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THE THERAPEUTIC VALUE OF INTEGRATING POLARITIES IN GESTALT THERAPY

by

(C) J. RALPH MARSHALL

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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THE THERAPEUTIC VALUE OF INTEGRATING POLARITIES

IN GESTALT THERAPY

submitted by J. RALPH MARSHALL .....

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education.

.....
Supervisor

.....

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Date April 16 1981

ABSTRACT

Existence is bipolar: such things as day and night, cold and hot, are opposites (polarities) which are aspects of a single unity. To define one (e.g. left) is to define the other (e.g. right).

The central point of the thesis is that Gestalt therapy's theory and practice of integrating polarities in the individual personality is of high value in the therapeutic task.

In healthy personality polarities (e.g. weakness and strength) flow together in a unity/centering/integration. Unhealthy personality is characterized by conflict and imbalance (through one-sidedness), behavior that is symptomatic of denied (disowned) aspects of self. Through the integrating of polarities conflict and splitness yield to harmony and wholeness.

Polarity integration was investigated through examining the relevant literature, supplemented by films and tapes of workshops, attendance at two workshops, and the author's substantial experience in Gestalt and other therapies.

The study examined Gestalt therapy's roots in psychoanalysis, Reichian character analysis, existentialism, Friedlander's differential thinking (thinking in opposites), gestalt psychology, and Eastern religion.

Consideration is given to the work of other polarity theorists: Heraclitus; Jung's principle of opposites and the shadow; Kelly's fixed-role constructs; and Bandler and Grinder's neuro-linguistic programming.

Integrating of polarities involves the three phases of

differentiation (separating out of polarities); identification (re-owning of polarities through contact); and assimilation (reconciliation).

Integration of polarities is facilitated by what the author terms the "basic modes" of Gestalt therapy: group, awareness continuum, dreams, fertile void, impasse, etc.; plus the utilization of the techniques of the empty chair, nonverbal cues, enactment, reversal, etc.

The study concludes with other dimensions of integrating polarities: a review of experimental studies, an assessment of the therapeutic value of integrating polarities, counselling suggestions, and areas in Gestalt therapy deserving further investigation.

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INTRODUCTION

Ten years ago the author had a counselling session with a woman who complained of anxiety and low self-esteem. Her husband was a perfectionist who insisted that the housekeeping be impeccable. Though inexperienced in polarity work, the author had her play her strong and weak sides. Presently the action reached a culmination when as her weak side she said to a third part (called her "self"), "I give to you my sensitivity and my ability to relate to people." From this assimilation (a term unknown to me then) she returned home a changed person now able to assert herself. I felt I'd witnessed a miracle, a dramatic change, that I only vaguely understood. I wanted to understand.

A second impetus for this study was my discovery in a study group of Jung's idea of the shadow. During the 1979 Christmas holidays--two years after the study group experience--I encountered the shadow idea again in a novel by Robertson Davies, Fifth Business, and was fascinated.

From this happenstance grew the intention to do a study comparing Jung's shadow and Perls' polarities. This changed shortly. I feared the vastness of Jungian thinking and I wanted the insights derived from the study to have practical application in my own counselling--an outcome not inconsistent with my past experience with Gestalt therapy. The focus of the study, therefore, was reduced from a comparison of Jung and Perls to a primary focus on Gestalt therapy.

The central point of the thesis is that Gestalt therapy's theory and practice of integrating polarities in the individual personality

is of high value in the therapeutic task.

I will attempt to validate this position by examining past and present theorists, with Perls as a key example, showing that polarity was an important dimension in their work. The primary method of investigation was an examination of the literature, supplemented by the use of tapes and films of group therapy workshops, attendance at two Gestalt workshops, and the author's experiences in Gestalt and other therapies over the past fifteen years.

Integration can be defined as the outcome of a process by which the individual moves from a state of conflict and splitness toward unification and wholeness. More accurately, we can speak of the integrating personality as one who, in a given moment, is owning his opposites and maintaining them in motion.

Our study asserts that integration is achieved through the owning of dissociated or disowned aspects of the personality. Owned and disowned parts can form polarities (opposites in opposition). These discordant polarities can become integrated through the three phases of integrating of polarities: differentiation, identification, and assimilation.

I begin with a study of the historical influences on Gestalt therapy, particularly the conceptual evolution of Frederick Perls. Chapter two outlines the integrating of polarities in other theorists: Heraclitus, Jung, Kelly, and Bandler and Grinder.

The third chapter explores the theoretical perspectives of Gestalt's integrating of polarities. The following chapter focuses on the methods and techniques of Gestalt polarity practice.

The fifth and final chapter assesses the value to therapy of the integrating of polarities. The chapter closes with suggestions of areas in Gestalt therapy worthy of further investigation.

CHAPTER I

THE HISTORICAL BASIS OF GESTALT THERAPY

A knowledge of the background of Gestalt therapy is necessary for understanding the integration of polarities in Gestalt therapy. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the historical background of Gestalt therapy through providing an overview of Gestalt therapy's principal roots.

Gestaltists have tended to be process-oriented with relatively less interest in theory. Representative works such as Gestalt Therapy Now (1970), Gestalt Therapy Integrated (1973), and Gestalt Is (1975) show an emphasis upon doing, especially in the lack of interest in the background of the co-founder of Gestalt Therapy, Frederick S. Perls.[1] Gestalt's ahistorical stance--as though Perls' formulations were a creation ex nihilo--robs the approach of a ground which could do much to illumine the main contours of the theory.

Following Smith (1976), five traditions influenced Perls: psychoanalysis, Reichian character analysis, existentialism, gestalt psychology, and Eastern religion. This chapter examines these influences. Writers acknowledged by Perls include philosophers Friedlander, Hegel, Husserl, Kant, Marx, and Vaihinger, and literary writers Huxley, Hesse, and Mark Twain.

I begin by examining Perls' relationship to psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalysis

Perls was a Freudian. He emerged from orthodox psychoanalysis; he was analyzed by Horney, Harnick, Clara Happel, and Reich, and supervised by Deutsch, Fenichel, Hirschman, Horney, and Landanner. His first book, Ego, Hunger, and Aggression was not intended to provide a new theory of personality, but, rather, constituted a revision of psychoanalytic theory.

He developed a love-hate relationship toward Freud. In his autobiography, In and Out the Garbage Pail, he defended his polemical stance towards Freud:

> My admiration, bewilderment, and vindictiveness are very strong. I am deeply moved by his suffering and courage. . . . I am deeply grateful for how much I developed through standing up against him. (p. 45)

He called Freud the "Edison of Psychiatry" (1969b, p.34), the "Livingstone of the Unconscious" (1947, p.86), and "saint-devil-genius" (1960, p.57). He had but one encounter, brief and disappointing, with Freud. In 1936 he travelled from South Africa to attend a psychoanalytic congress to deliver a paper and to see Freud. While standing in Freud's doorway he was given a curt, cool, four-minute audience.

Illustrative of the far-reaching influence of his psychoanalytic background is a situation that developed in his first year at Esalen (1963). A colleague broke with him for a time over Perls' topdog position in the use of the hot-seat technique. He objected to Perls' using a manipulative stance which left out the personal Perls. He saw this as a hangover from Perls' psychoanalytic background (Kempler,

1973, p.253)

Perls' revision of the psychoanalytic position in Ego, Hunger, and Aggression set forth three criticisms of Freud:

> 1) the treatment of psychological facts as if they exist in isolation from the organism as a whole;
> 2) the use of linear association psychology as a basis for a four-dimensional system;
> 3) the neglect of the phenomenon of differentiation.
>
> (Smith, 1976, p.5)

Perls offered the following revisions:

> 1) replacement of the psychological by the holistic organismic concept;
> 2) replacement of association psychology by the field theory of gestalt psychology; and
> 3) application of differential thinking based on Friedlander's notion of "creative indifference."
>
> (Smith, p.5)

To Freud's instinctual theory of psychosexuality Perls (1947) opposed the hunger instinct as at least as defensible ("For the survival of the individual sustenance is the important function, for the survival of the species, sex," 1969b, p.46.) He omitted the structure and nature of the unconcious, and the tripartite view of the personality as id, ego, and superego.

In principle he had little disagreement with major Freudian postulates. The difference between Freud and Perls was that Perls' focus was less theoretical and more applied and behavioristic. It is much later in Perls' life that we see his constructs as something more like a life-orienting philosophy rather than only a psychodynamic system of existential psychotherapy.

Perls held that Freud's discoveries were valid but that the philosophy and technique of psychoanalysis had become obsolete (Perls, 1969b, p.34). The historical orientation of Freud's method,

working with material that was not here-and-now, was essentially a waste of time.

The two members of the psychoanalytic movement who were to have the greatest influence on Perls were Freud and Reich. In the next section the author examines Reichian character analysis.

Reichian Character Analysis

On Karen Horney's suggestion, after six unproductive years in analysis, Perls began therapy with Wilhelm Reich. While Perls did not become a Reichian, he was greatly influenced by the early Reich.

He was attracted by Reich's vitality, his willingness to discuss any subject especially sex and politics, and his rebelliousness (Perls, 1969b, p.49).

Reich brought the body into psychotherapy. He spoke of "body armor," that is, posture, gesture, and muscular tension: Reich held that resistances become embedded in the musculature. A leading Gestalt reference has set forth the connection between repressive body armor and therapy in the Reichian system:

> Reich described the creation of the body armor as the habitual residue of the habitual act of repression, which, for him, consisted of nothing more than a person selectively tightening up his muscles. Therapy then was devoted to loosening up these restrictive body rigidities so as to release the excitement for the natural behavior which the individual had buried. (Polster & Polster, 1973, p.315)

In gestalt therapy repression is seen as essentially a muscular phenomenon: "When needs and impulses arise, there tends to be a muscular response," as in the "holding back" of a desire to strike someone in anger (Wallen, 1970, p.11).

The body-oriented therapy of Reich complemented and extended Perls' experiences earlier in the theatre. From childhood Perls had been fascinated with the theatre. In late adolescence he worked with the fabled director Max Reinhardt from whom he learned the importance of body language. From Reich he learned not only to attend to physical manifestations but even to touch the patient, a taboo for psychoanalysts. Perls came to view Reich's body armor as resulting from the processes of projection and retroflection.

Reich's Character Analysis (first published in 1933), with its emphasis upon present attitudes rather than the memories of the past, showed that the patient builds up a character structure to defend himself against both the demands of the external environment and the impulses from within.

A second influence of Reich on Perls was Reich's rule that remembrances had to be accompanied by appropriate affect. Perls came to reject any recall of the past that did not include a present re-experiencing of the past incident as "mind-fucking." He differed from Reich's tendency to see emotions as nuisances to be gotten rid of. In contrast, Perls saw emotions as natural elements without which "we are dead, bored, uninvolved machines" (Perls, 1969b, p.51). He was skeptical of the enduring value of a single emotional breakthrough; things still had to be worked through.

A third way in which Reich's influence is to be seen is in Perls' confrontive style. Dr. Nic. Waal, a onetime analysand of Reich, spoke gratefully of the "hard love" she experienced from Reich (Boadella, 1973, p.366). By "hard love" she meant Reich's insistence on honesty

in the relationship, his refusal to accept behavior that did not express her authentic self. In a work (1973) published after his death Perls declared:

> The therapist's primary responsibility is not to let go unchallenged any statement or behavior which is not representative of the self, which is evidence of the patient's lack of self-responsibility. . . .He must deal with each one of the neurotic mechanisms as it appears. (p.80)

Perls felt that growth comes through frustration. The therapist skillfully balances support and frustration.

A fourth influence came from Reich's assertion that the "how" of a patient's presentation is as important as the "what" (Reich, 1949, p.45). Following this line of thinking Perls made "why" questions taboo. He insisted, instead, "There are two legs upon which Gestalt Therapy walks: now and how" (1969a, p.44). With Reich he gave attention to the expression rather than the content. Reich had asserted: "Words can lie. The expression never lies" (Reich, 1973, p.171). In Gestalt therapy voice tone, pitch, and facial expression (rather than words) convey the true message.

Another similarity between Reich and Perls had to do with Reich's "phase of the breakdown of secondary narcissism." This moment, experienced as complete helplessness, can be connected with Perls' impasse (Smith, 1976, pp.10-11). Perls defined impasse as the position where environmental support or obsolete inner support is no longer adequate and authentic self-support has not yet been achieved. Cohn (1970) regards the impasse phenomenon as Perls' unique and most important contribution to psychotherapeutic practice (p.137).

Lastly, Reich can be credited with Perls' insistence that

therapeutic techniques be derived from the individual's circumstances.

Perls was of Reich but not a Reichian. While hardly a celibate, Perls does not appear to have upheld the central Reichian tenet that the capacity of orgasm is the sign of vital functioning and that a satisfactory sex life is necessary for mental health. Reich's discovery of the orgone, a central concern in his later writings, held little appeal for Perls. On investigating Reich's orgone box he discovered that its functioning was vulnerable to suggestibility (Perls, 1969b, p.51).

Smith (1976) has drawn attention to a fellow member with Perls of Reich's seminars, Hellmuth Kaiser. Perls, who rarely acknowledged another as a good therapist, spoke of Kaiser as a lovely person and a good therapist.

> Kaiser's position can be summarized by the "universal triad:"
>
> The universal psychopathology is the attempt to create in real life the universal "illusion of fusion" (the illusion that one is not alone but is fused with others). The universal symptom is "duplicitous communication" (failure to be "behind one's words"). The universal treatment is straightforward (nonduplicitous) communication. (Smith, p.14)

In this quotation one hears echoes of Perls' emphasis upon achieving self-support versus the neurotic tendency to manipulate the environment to obtain support. Kaiser emphasized that the neurotic fails to stand behind his words, thus perpetuating the illusion that he is not self-responsible. Kaiser's rule was not to withdraw in the encounters but to stay "nonduplicitously" with the patient.

Kaiser's emphasis upon straightforward communication was closely related to the conditions of aloneness (versus the "illusion of fusion") and authenticity, qualities of much interest to the

existentialists. The following section examines Perls' debt to existentialism and to the philosopher Friedlander.

Existentialism

Existentialist philosophy is identified with a long list of intellectuals including Husserl, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Jaspers, Heidegger, Marcel, Buber, Tillich, Kafka, Sartre, Camus, Binswanger, and Medard Boss. The precise points of contact between this tradition and Perls are by no means clear. Perls (1969b) says he knew of Tillich, Buber, and Scheler while in Frankfurt but had little involvement with them (p.60). Claudio Naranjo sees a direct connection between existentialism and gestalt therapy:

> Gestalt therapy is one of the three psychiatric schools that have arisen from phenomenology and existentialism, the other two being Frankl's logotherapy and Binswanger's Daseins Analyse. . . . Van Dusen, in his discussion of existential analytic therapy, claims, "There is a psychotherapeutic approach which most closely fits the theory. In fact, a close adherence to the theory demands a particular approach. The approach has been called Gestalt therapy, and considerable credit for it is due to Dr. F.S. Perls." (1971, p.135)

While Perls saw his therapy as existentialist he felt his was the only existentialist approach that could stand on its own feet. Of existentialist philosophies he said:

> This much had penetrated: existential philosophy demands taking responsibility for one's existence. But which of the existential schools has the Truth with a capital T?
>
> Skeptically, I searched further and this is where I stand now. In spite of all the anti-conceptual and pro-phenomenological bias, no existential philosophy stands on its own feet. . . .
>
> What is Tillich without his Protestantism, Buber without his Chassidism, Marcel without Catholicism? Can you imagine Sartre without support from his Communist ideas, Heidegger without support from language, or Binswanger without psychoanalysis? (1969b, p.60; see also

1969a, p.16)

In an article entitled "The Philosophical Background of Gestalt Therapy" the author makes the judgment that Perls' genius was not that "he got his ideas from Whitehead, Husserl, Heidegger, and Sartre," but that "he embodies therapeutically some of the leading philosphical concepts of the day. He reflected his age while intuiting a significant new synthesis in practical philosophy" (Stewart, 1974, p.14).

What were the existentialist ideas implicit in gestalt therapy? One was the concept of individual responsibility. Individuals were to be seen as agents, not victims. Existentialists urged man to "consider his immediate existence and to consider the possibility that he may be the exclusive force that influences that existence" (Kempler, 1973, p.252). Translated into gestalt terminology the individual is urged to <u>own</u> his behavior, implying not only that the behavior is his, but that he is the author of that behavior and not merely a victim of it.

Another existentialist idea incorporated by gestaltists was the "I-thou" relationship originated by Martin Buber. Therapy was seen as an encounter between two persons (rather than as merely a doctor-patient relationship), a mutually nourishing relationship where each individual is open, honest, and appropriately mindful of the other's needs.

Perls may have differed from the existentialists in one way. He lacked the pessimism characteristic of the existentialist movement. During a drug trip, he recalled a scene where he had nearly died. He emerged from the trip with a strong will to live saying, "The existentialist mood of being 'condemned to' life changed into being

'blessed with' life" (1969b, p.235).

The pervasive influence of existentialist ideology is evident in summary statements of Gestalt therapy like that of Naranjo (1970): (1) Live now. (2) Live here. (3) Stop imagining. Experience what is real. (4) Stop unnecessary thinking. (5) Express rather than manipulate, explain, justify, or judge. (6) Give in to unpleasantness and pain just as to pleasure. Do not restrict your awareness. (7) Accept no should or ought other than your own. (8) Take full responsibility for your actions, feelings, and thoughts. (9) Surrender to being as you are (in Smith, 1976, pp.17-18).

How are the elements of Gestalt therapy just listed existentialist? "Surrender to being as you are" expresses the existentialist call to authentic existence. Authenticity is the spirit of living now, living here, and honest expressing (1,2,5). The existentialist belief in freedom and responsibility lies behind the rejection of external demands (7) and the urging of individual responsibility (8). All of the nine imply the courage, which Tillich (1952) called "the courage to be."

Friedlander

Perls' most specific acknowledgement of the impact of philosophy upon his thought was to that of Sigmund Friedlander. Perls was tremendously impressed with Friedlander. Years later he said of him, "As a personality, he was the first man in whose presence I felt humble, bowing in veneration. There was no room for my chronic arrogance" (1969b, p.75).

From Friedlander Perls acquired the principle of differential

thinking, a perspective which was to be central to gestalt therapy. Friedlander held that "every event is related to a zero-point from which a differentiation into opposites takes place" (Perls, 1947, p.15). Friedlander's thinking in opposites (differential thinking) and the related principle of creative indifference are of major interest to this paper and will be dealt with more fully in a later chapter.

The branch of academic psychology from which the name for Perls' therapy came, gestalt psychology, will now be considered.

Gestalt Psychology

Perls named his approach "gestalt" (a German word meaning pattern or configuration). Gestaltists have not been completely satisfied with the label, suspecting that it was chosen largely because gestalt psychology was uppermost in Perls' mind at the time. That gestalt psychology supplied not only the name for the therapy but was also the source of important aspects of its theory and practice will become evident in the following pages (see also Emerson & Smith, 1974; Wallen, 1970).

While Max Wertheimer is generally acknowledged as the originator of gestalt psychology, there are, behind him, a number of other theorists who helped lay the groundwork.

Immanuel Kant, the eighteenth century philosopher, bequeathed to academic psychology the concept that "perception of the world is not a totally objective process, but that the perceiving mind contributes organization to this external data" (Smith, 1976, p.20).

In 1890 Ehrenfels set out a doctrine of form qualities (Gestaltqualitäten); four lines comprising a square have the quality of squareness. He saw a melody as an illustration of a pattern that is independent of the particular sensational elements of which it is composed. This example supports "the whole is more than the sum of the parts."

In Denmark Rubin did extensive work with figure-ground relationships. He produced the famous vase-profile figure-ground phenomena where the object of attention becomes the field and the remainder the background (see figure 1).

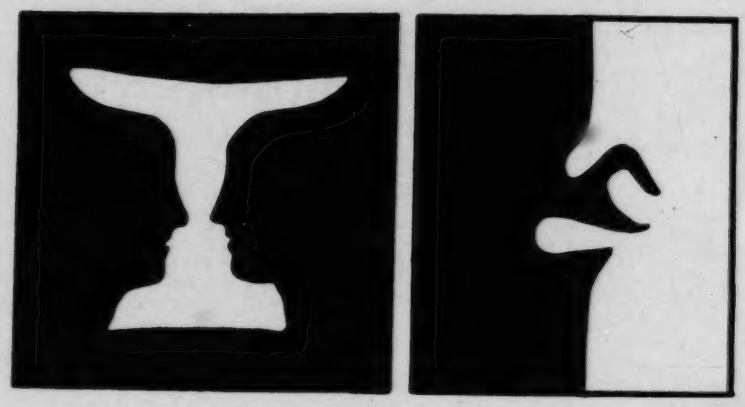


Fig. I.

(Sahakian, 1975, p.182)

On the groundwork of Ehrenfels and Rubin, Wertheimer, in 1912, along with his associates Koffka and Köhler, published a paper on the "phi phenomenon" and the idea of apparent motion. Wertheimer found that when two lines are visually presented serially, and one

slightly distant from the other, an interstimulus interval can be reached such that it appears that one line has been presented in motion. This apparent motion, or phi phenomenon, is the basis for motion pictures.

These early gestaltists (1912+) opposed the reductionism of structuralism (the then reigning psychological theory) and the reductionism of the new behaviorism. Instead of dividing subject matter into elements (as both structuralists and behaviorists were wont to do) the gestaltists urged that behavior is better understood as whole, meaningful experiences and is to be most advantageously studied as such (Hergenhahn, 1976, p.238).

One of the overriding principles of perception was that of "pragnanz" (the German word for pregnant). Koffka (1935) defined the law of pragnanz as follows: "Psychological organization will always be as good as the controlling circumstances permit" (in Hergenhahn, p.241). That is, there is a tendency for any psychological event to be meaningful, complete, and simple.

Over a hundred principles of perception were studied by the gestaltists. Among these were figure-ground,continuity, proximity, inclusiveness, similarity, common fate, and closure.

Kurt Lewin and Kurt Goldstein extended the studies of Wertheimer, Koffka, and Köhler into the realm of personality.

Perls read Lewin and was familiar with his field theory, which was to have much influence on child psychology and social psychology. A field, according to Lewin, is a dynamic, interrelated system. Whatever happens to a person affects everything alse about him. Lewin

spoke also of a person's "life-space," the totality of facts or events that determine a person's behavior at a given moment. He coined the term "group dynamics" (in 1939) which was to influence the development of group therapy and the encounter group movement. Perls was later to eschew individual psychotherapy in favor of group therapy carried out in his unique individual-centered style (see Perls, 1975b).

Perls knew Kurt Goldstein, having worked as his assistant in research with brain-damaged soldiers. From him he learned the term "self-actualization" (though he says he did not understand it at the time) (Perls, 1969b, pp.4-5); and, Goldstein's view that anxiety was the result of catastrophic expectations.

Goldstein's most significant contribution to psychology was his organismic or holistic theory by which he proposed that the organism behaves as a unified whole, not as a series of differentiated parts. He emphasized the unity, integration, consistency, and coherence of the normal personality. The influence of Goldstein on Perls was profound.

In Ego, Hunger, and Aggression Perls referred to the work of Lewin's student Zeigarnik. She had suggested that unfinished tasks were remembered better than finished tasks because of remaining tension (the Zeigarnik effect).

Perls' comment on his relation to the Gestalt psychologists was,

> My relation to the gestalt psychologists was a peculiar one. I admired a lot of their work, especially the early work of Kurt Lewin. I could not go along when they became logical positivists. I have not read any of their textbooks, only some papers of Lewin, Wertheimer, and Köhler. Most important for me was the idea of the unfinished situation, the incomplete gestalt. The academic Gestaltists of course never accepted me. I certainly was not a pure Gestaltist.

> My prominent fantasy was that they were all alchemists looking for gold, for complete verification, and that I was satisfied to use the less impressive but more useful products that fell by the wayside. (1969b, pp.62-63).

Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman (1951) stated that the chief insights of gestalt psychology used in gestalt therapy were:

> 1) The relation of figure and background;
> 2) The importance of interpreting the coherence or split of a figure in terms of the total context of the actual situation;
> 3) The definite structured whole that is not too inclusive yet is not a mere atom;
> 4) The active organizing force of meaningful wholes and the natural tendency toward simplicity of form;
> 5) The tendency of unfinished situations to complete themselves. (pp.237-238)

Perls was particularly interested in the concept of unfinished situations, what he often called, "unfinished business." He wrote (1969b), "The most interesting and important property of the gestalt is its dynamic--the need of a strong gestalt to come to a closure. . . . The best name for the incomplete gestalt is the unfinished situation" (p.65).

Perls got the word "holism" from the South African Jan Smuts who had written Holism and Evolution. In Smuts' view, whole systems often have properties that are distinct from the properties of their parts; there is an impulse toward increasing organization, toward wholeness in every individual (Fadiman & Frager, 1976, p.95).

The gestalt-organismic (holistic) position is strongly represented in Perls' writing, from his law of self-regulation (i.e. the figure-ground formation which is strongest will temporarily take over control of the organism) and his view of learning as discovery, to his discussion of self-actualization.

In Gestalt therapy needs organize and energize behavior. For example, a person is reading, becomes thirsty, leaves his reading and satisfies his thirst, and comes back to reading. According to Wallen (1970), "We have a hierarchy of needs continually developing, organizing the figures of experience, and disappearing. We describe this process in Gestalt therapy as progressive formation and destruction of perceptual and motor gestalts" (p.9).

The academic psychologists had stopped short of applying their insights to the perception of one's own feelings and bodily sensations. To do so was Perls' contribution. Wallen has said:

> This approach represents an extension of academic Gestalt psychology by adding needs and bodily awareness to the gestalt-forming process and then utilizing these insights in therapy to help unlock the need-fulfillment pattern. (1970, p.13)

To close this survey of the relation of gestalt psychology to Gestalt therapy it may be of interest to repeat Perls' succinct phrasing of his debt to gestalt psychology:

> Reality is nothing but
> The sum of all awareness
> As you experience here and now.
> The ultimate of science thus appears
> As Husserl's unit of phenomenon
> And Ehrenfeld's discovery:
> The irreducible phenomenon of all
> Awareness, the one he named
> And we still call
> GESTALT. (1969b, p.30)

Following his tutelage with Freud, Reich, the existentialists, and gestalt psychology, Perls went on to learn from Eastern religions.

Eastern Religion

Perls' later work owed much to Eastern religions, particularly Zen Buddhism and Taoism (see Perls, 1969b, pp.59-60; Spitzer in Perls, 1973, p.vii). Impatient and disillusioned with his profession, in 1960 he made a world trip that included stops in Japan and Israel. On return he jokingly described himself as a "Zen Judaist" (Shepard, 1975, p.110).

Stewart (1974), noting Perls' impatience with philosophy and systematic thinking, reasoned that Perls was attracted to Eastern philosophies because of their concentration on the practicalities of living (p.13).

Both Perls' and Eastern thought abound in paradox. Gestaltists maintain that change is paradoxical: one grows by becoming what he is, not by trying to be different (Beisser, p.77) (Cf. Kierkegaard: "To be that self which I truly am," in Shostrum, 1967, p.xiii).

Taking paradox a further step, Gestalt therapy can be seen as non-undoing rather than a doing (Naranjo, 1970, p.50). For the person who would stop smoking, the Zen master (the Roshi) might see the act of smoking as a violation of nature, an act that is the undoing of the natural flow or process. Salvation comes through allowing the flow, not interfering with the natural process, and not undoing one's nature.

Westerners tend to fear emptiness. Fritz spoke of the "fertile void," saying (1970), "The empty mind in Eastern philosophy is worthy of highest praise. So lose your mind and come to your senses" (p.38). Taoism has a principle of creating a void so that nature can develop there. It is a process of standing out of the way of one's flow, or,

as one of the gestalt watchwords has it, "Don't push your river."[2]

Trusting one's void is in accord with the teaching of Lao Tse, the eminent master of Taoism. He assumed that nature knew best and that people freed of the conventions and rules of culture will achieve harmonious integration. In opposition to this was the Confucian tradition which saw the necessity for a body of rules and laws to govern man's interactions and produce a better society (Shepard, 1975, p.219). Perls had his own polarities. For all his allegiance to Taoism, he had his own shoulds (follow your impulses, favor your underdog, explore your craziness, people shouldn't be uptight).

In contrast to living in accord with our true nature we are apt to live "as if" (Vaihinger) existences in which fantasy, reality, and pretending become confused. The "as if" existence is similar to the Maya of Eastern thought (Perls, 1969a, pp.46-47,50). Maya hangs as a veil between us and reality making the perception of reality difficult. The goal is to lift this Maya and bring about a satori, a wakening up, an immediate, and sometimes dramatic, recontacting with reality.

Growth comes from living in the present, the here and now. Nothing exists except the here and now (Perls, 1969a, p.41). In Buddhism the now is the condition of the wise:

> Do not hark to things that passed
> And for the future cherish no fond hopes:
> The past was left behind by thee,
> The future state has not yet come.
>
> But who with vision clear can see
> The present which is here and now
> Such wise one should aspire to win
> What never can be lost nor shaken.
> (Pali Canon, in Naranjo, 1970, p.67)

Perls was suspicious of the splits in Western thinking, especially the good-bad dichotomy and was attracted to the "nonmoral" attitude in Zen (Perls in Shepard, 1975, p.65). In his earliest book (1947) he asserted that "good" and "bad" are not facts of nature but only one's judgmental reactions to nature (pp.52-59), mainly the outcomes of projection processes (Perls, 1953-54, in Naranjo, 1970, pp.48-49). Beyond the morality of good and evil (a following of rules experienced as extrinsic to man) is the obedience of the intrinsic, the "living in the Tao--following one's proper way" (Naranjo, 1970, p.49).

Another flavor of the East in Perls' work was his admonition to beware the computer or any form of thinking that interferes with awareness. Eastern sages had said that one must make oneself empty in order to be filled. Perls constantly urged that one lose his mind in order to come to his senses. Both Gestalt therapy and Eastern religions offer paths toward the suspension of thought.

Other Influences

Perls was willing to investigate nearly anything that might have value for therapy including--the now infamous--scientology (Shepard, 1975, p.64). He was "rolfed" by Ida Rolf. He borrowed heavily from Moreno's psychodrama for his empty chair-role playing techniques and in the emphasis that discoveries come from participating in experience, not just talking about experience. He read Vaihinger, and the semantic theorists I.A. Richards and Korzybski.

Laura Perls, the cofounder of gestalt therapy, was a pivotal

person in Perls' journey (see Kogan, 1973, pp.6-7). Their marriage separation and her New York location when he was emerging into public view at Esalen, account for some of the neglect of her. She continues to contribute to the movement (e.g. 1968; 1970).

Gestalt therapy came into its own through the coincidence in time and place of a developing humanist movement in education and psychology. Perhaps the single most important event in the burgeoning of the human potential movement was the establishment of Esalen (at Big Sur, California) in 1961.

"The target Esalen scored a bull's-eye with the arrow Fritz Perls" (Perls, 1969b, p.145). The impatient, wandering Fritz had found home. Here he was to write his autobiography and say, "Never in my life did I love and respect so many people as I do here" (p.262). To this period of nearly six years belong his interactions with peers and students, including Maslow, Rogers, Alan Watts, Rollo May, and Jim Simkin, Mike Murphy, Janet Lederman, Claudio Naranjo, Abe Levitsky, Bob Hall, Dick Price, and Teddy Lyon.

The foregoing has been an historical overview of the roots of Gestalt therapy. It may be useful now to highlight some of the specific connections with our topic, the integrating of polarities. Becoming aware of disowned polarities has parallels in Freud's emphasis upon making unconcious repressed material concious. Reich's influence is present in such important aspects of polarity work as emotionality, the body, and the impasse. The owning of responsibility--perhaps particularly for one's projections--and the "going with" feelings, reflect existentialist ideas. From gestalt psychology polarity

exploration gained its emphasis upon figure-ground, unfinished business, the push for closure, and the organism's tendency to seek an integrating wholeness. Polarities differentiate out from a fertile void, a conception of Eastern religion.

The core idea of polarity integration is the principle of differential thinking (thinking in opposites). Among the several sources from which the integrating of polarities emerged, Friedlander's contribution of the principle of differential thinking is paramount.

The reader may be asking, Is Gestalt therapy the primary or only therapeutic approach that utilizes polarity integration in facilitating personality change? The next chapter is an explication of polarities and their integration as elaborated by other selected theorists, past and present.

CHAPTER II

THE LITERATURE OF INTEGRATING POLARITIES

The purpose of this chapter is to briefly sketch the integrating of polarities as it occurs in the theory and practice of Heraclitus, Jung, Kelly, and Bandler and Grinder. Each section will conclude with brief comments regarding the relation of the ideas of the integrating of polarities in Gestalt therapy.

I begin with a philosopher in ancient Greece.

Heraclitus

The integrating of polarities has precursors dating back to ancient Greece. Preeminent (for our purposes) among the early Greeks was Heraclitus.

Heraclitus (540-480 B.C.) maintained that everything exists in ceaseless flux. The universe is ever active, a state of affairs which he saw epitomized by fire. Change is the essence of existence for, he said, "One cannot step twice into the same river" (in Stallknecht & Brumbaugh, 1950, p.6). In Heraclitus' view, it is only our lack of observation that sees things as fixed. Water, for instance, is never hot or cold, it is always cooling or warming. The very existence of things is a becoming.

The principle of change was closely related to the notion of opposites. Nature is a battle of opposites. Hot and cold, for example, struggle to dominate the course of events.

Heraclitus maintained that opposites have a regulative function.

According to his principle of enantiodromia everything flows into its opposite. Jung (1966), centuries later, was to laud Heraclitus' articulation of this psychological law. In Heraclitus' system, every quality is doomed to beget its opposite.

Opposites are not really different: they are aspects of a single unity. The opposite poles of a bipolarity are related as, for example, left defines right. Contraries and contradictions, then, are not unrelated phenomena, but are actually correlatives of each other.

Opposites oppose each other in discord and strife. The tension between the polarities is the source of energy and of harmony. Polarity, then, is a prerequisite for aliveness. It is also the condition of harmony: "That which is in opposition is in concert and from things that differ comes the most beautiful harmony" (Heraclitus in Koenker, 1971, p.10).

The integrating of polarities, the theme of our study, is prefigured and enriched by Heraclitus' thought: his conception of change, the bipolarity of existence, the tension between conflicting polarities, and the harmonious unity that can emerge from opposites openly conflicting.

Another Greek contribution of interest to our study of polarities is found in the realm of dialectics. The word dialectic means opposition or bipolarity: the idea that meanings suggest their obverse (One defines the term "left" and at the same time defines the term "right"). The Greeks used the word dialectics to describe a method of discourse.

The Socratic dialogues of Plato were predicated on the assumption

that through dialectical reasoning one can move from opinion to truth. Plato believed that truth can be known by way of error. That claim can be made since truth and error are essentially dialectical sides to the totality of events. Right dialogue (i.e. dialectics) was open-ended and was to be distinguished from the methods of the Sophists who sought to manipulate and gain advantage by dialoguing toward a predetermined end. In so doing the Sophists killed off the most valuable aspect of the bipolarity of meanings: the creative generation of alternative possiblities.

Dialectic as a type of reasoning and discourse--though of great importance in the history of philosophy--is of little interest for our study. What does interest us is those occasions where dialectics is used to refer to the integrating of polarities.

In these ancient philosophers we have the beginnings of polarity theory. Here are intimations of a current formulation (Bahm, 1970) that sees polarity as involving the general categories of oppositeness, complementarity, and tension.

From this survey of Heraclitus, a philosopher in the Greece of the fifth century B.C., the author moves now to modern times to a discussion of the father of analytic psychology, Carl Jung.

Jung

No other modern psychological theorist has been more interested in the bipolar nature of personality than Carl Jung. He felt that the problem of opposites was central to any critical psychology. He asserted, "A psychological theory. . .must base itself on the principle

of opposition. . . . There is no balance, no system of self-regulation without opposition" (1966, p.61). For Jung there is opposition everywhere in the personality: extraversion and introversion, thinking and feeling, conciousness and unconciousness, ego and shadow.

Libido or energy arises from the tension between opposites, somewhat analogously to the flow between the positive and negative poles of an electric circuit. The greater the tension the greater the energy. Conflict between opposing elements in the personality is the essence of life itself for, he said, "Life is born only of the spark of opposites" (1966, p. 53).

Psychic energy operates according to two principles: equivalence and entropy. Equivalence means that when energy is used in one part of the system an equal amount of energy will appear elsewhere. Thus, lowering one value raises another value. Through an understanding of equivalence one would expect that as a child's valuation of his family decreases, his interest in other people and things will increase. In Jungian thinking energy is not lost but merely redistributed.

The principle of entropy, by which energy tends to flow from the stronger to the weaker in an equalization of differences, is the means by which the organism seeks balance. Entropy produces a vacillation between poles of opposition until a state of equilibrium is reached. Entropy implies that energies seek a common level. (Jung's entropy that moves the organism toward equilibrium appears to be what Gestalt therapy terms the identification-assimilation process.)

Opposing elements in the personality seek for and move toward unity. Jung felt that there is a push toward balance, a teleological, purposive search for wholeness in the psyche. Such optimism has led to speculation that Jung may be a source for the optimism characteristic of such figures as Rogers and Allport (Hall & Lindzey, 1978, p.149).

Though there is a push for balance and wholeness in the personality, personality frequently develops a one-sidedness. There can be an over-emphasis on conciousness, or feeling, or extraversion. One-sided development is basic to Jung's understanding of neuroses. Rather than viewing a neurosis merely as a sign of distress, he saw neuroses as attempts to compensate for a one-sided attitude. A neurosis pushes the individual toward growth and expanded awareness.

A person is born an undifferentiated whole. Development proceeds from a global to a differentiated to an integrated state. What Perls called integration and being in one's centre Jung called individuation. Individuation involves a differentiating out of the self from all the components of personality. The limited ego is gradually replaced by the self as the centre of personality.

The self is that which unites all opposites in the psyche, a midpoint of total unity. The self is life's goal. The self motivates the individual to search for wholeness, a search more typical of middle age than youth. Though rarely reached, the self may be momentarily experienced in true religious experience. The appearance in dreams of the mandala symbol symbolizes the process of individuation and the wholeness of the self (Jung, 1965, p.335).

A particularly fascinating instance of one-sided development is Jung's idea of the shadow. The shadow contains the animal, instinctual side of personality. It is made up of alienated, denied parts. The shadow is that part of personality of which we are unaware but which we are particularly allergic to (through projection) in others. Shadow qualities do not correspond to our concious ideals. When we say, following particularly embarrassing behavior, "I was not myself", we are probably dealing with a momentary emergence of our shadow. The shadow is part of the personal unconcious.

Jung felt the shadow is potentially valuable to the personality and that it is important to make this repressed part of the personality concious. Once surfaced into conciousness a tension of opposites is produced making forward movement possible by means of the principle of entropy. The assimilation of these repressed shadow contents into conciousness is an instance of learning to love or at least accept, one's enemy. (In one of Robertson Davies' novels (1971) the hero, a middled-aged man of exemplary qualities, confronts his "devil", i.e. his shadow side, and, in so doing, experiences enlargement and wholeness.)

Jungian psychotherapy seeks to bring the two halves of the psyche, the concious and the unconcious, together again. The aim is to effect a confrontation with the unconcious, with the split-off aspects of the self. Once these never-admitted aspects of personality are known, a state of wholeness is possible. In Rychlak's description of Jung's theory of cure wholeness is connected with findings a balancing midpoint in the personality:

> The aim of psychotherapy is to convince the patient to give up the naive belief that life is exclusively the domain of ego conciousness and to find a new midpoint in the personality. This process begins with a recognition of the ego versus shadow polarity and settles into an eventual balance at. . .the "midpoint of the personality". The ego is not given preference in this balancing, nor is the shadow. As Jung said: "Assimilation is never a question of 'this or that,' but always of 'this and that.'" One grows only by becoming whole. (1973, p.175)

The state of individuation or wholeness is not achieved without suffering. In a letter Jung (1973) took pains to make clear that the middle line that may be reached between opposites is not achieved by the exercise of the intellect. Rather, he said, the middle line is

> a result of the conflict one has to suffer. . . . You have to heat up such conflicts until they rage in full swing so that the opposites slowly melt together. It is a sort of alchemistic procedure rather than a rational choice and decision. The suffering is an indispensable part of it. . . . I admit it is not easy to find the right formula, yet if you find it you have made a whole of yourself and this, I think, is the meaning of human life. (in Fadiman & Frager, 1976, p.70)

Jung spoke of the transition to the afternoon of life, middle age, necessitating reevaluation of earlier values. The danger in a too radical change is that one may repress one's former life and the new state is as unbalanced and exaggerated as the earlier one-sidedness.

For all Jung's optimism he saw the most serious problems of life as unsolvable. Life's contradictions and polarities are necessary to give zest (libido generation) for the future. Furthermore, there are two sides to most things, rather than a side that is the truth for all occasions. If ever a serious problem appears to be solved, one can be sure something important has been lost, for, "The meaning and purpose of a problem seem to lie not in its solutions but in our

working at it incessantly" (Jung, in Fadiman & Frager, p.78).

There are many intersections between Jungian therapy and the integrating of polarities in Gestalt therapy. Jung's concept of the shadow residing in the unconcious parallels Perls' denied aspects of personality of which the person is not yet aware. What Jung called the push for balance Perls spoke of as the push for closure. Both saw growth as requiring suffering (in Gestalt therapy one must go through the fearful impasse). The two approaches essentially agree in defining the personality's goal as wholeness, called, respectively, individuation and integration.

Polarities and their expression in role playing are characteristic of George Kelly's work. Kelly's approach to these matters is explicated in the next section.

Kelly

In a two-volume work The Psychology of Personal Constructs (1955) George Kelly argued that human behavior is largely a function of a person's attempts to predict and control events. For Kelly, behavior is anticipatory.

Kelly's detailed and complicated theory proposes that each individual construes or formulates hypotheses about his world which help him to order and predict. Kelly asserted a fundamental postulate: "A person's processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events" (1955, p.46).

Each person evolves a system of constructs by which he discerns patterns in events. Constructs (the result of abstracting properties

from events) are considered dichotomous, finite in number, and are hierarchically arranged. Constructs differ from person to person. Thus, two students might have the same professor but will respond to him quite differently because one applies the construct warm vs. cold and the other, original vs. humdrum (Levy, 1970, p.264). (In Gestalt, these responses might be interpreted as projection.)

Eleven corollaries follow from Kelly's fundamental postulate among which is the dichotomy corollary. Kelly ascribed a dichotomous quality to all human thinking. He held that meanings are rarely unipolar and that one is incapable of saying merely one thing about anything:

> Whatever one says about any event gathers its meaning from what contrasting things could otherwise have been said about it, as much as from the other events of which the same might have been said. (Kelly in Rychlak, 1973, p.507)

To say that one event will take place is to say that another will not take place.

The construct table has meaning not only because a class of objects, tables, are similar to each other, but also because certain objects of furniture stand in contrast.

A change in a construct brings about changed behavior. A wife had construed as unmanly her husband's refusal to complain about poor waitress service. When his behavior came to be interpreted in terms of considerateness the relationship improved (Levy, p.265). The therapeutic task is to assist the client to reconstrue (revise) his constructs.

Kelly has developed a rather elaborate therapeutic system. For our purposes, we will limit our discussion to his fixed role therapy.

Fixed role therapy rests on the assumption that what a person is is largely influenced by the behavior and role he performs. If he can be encouraged to perform a certain new role, he is likely to become the person embodied in the role. Fixed role therapy attempts to get the person to employ new role behavior.

In order to propose a new role for his client the therapist has to discover the client's sytem of constructs. He does this through personal interview, through use of the Role Construct Repertory Test (Rep Test), and through a self-characterization sketch written by the client. In the Rep Test the client is asked to name persons with whom he is daily associated. Groups of three are then selected, and the client is asked to tell in what important way two of them are alike but different from the third. In the several forms of the test, as many as twenty to thirty triads may be used. In this way the Rep test yields a list of constructs (constituting a map of the individual's cognitive structure) assumed to represent the main dimensions along which the person sorts the significant figures in his life.

In addition to the Rep test the client is asked to write a self-characterization sketch. He writes this sketch of himself in the third person as though it were written by a friend who knows him intimately and sympathetically.

Based on information gained through interviews, the Rep test, and a self-characterization sketch, the therapist writes a fixed role sketch that is <u>opposite</u> to the role the client ordinarily plays.

The client is asked for the next two weeks to act as though he were the person in the sketch. He meets every other day with the

therapist for rehearsals and tries to think, act, talk, and be like the person in the sketch. "The important thing about the fixed-role enactment," said Kelly, "is not that it gives the person an authentic way to live, but that it invites him to try a new way, calculated and venturesome, and to appraise its outcomes" (in Maher, 1969, p.64).

Both Kelly and Perls see that reality has bipolar dimensions: a thing is defined by what it is not. Such Gestalt defenses as projection and retroflection could be understood, from a Kelly perspective, as having the function of predicting and ordering experience. The therapeutic task in Kelly's view is to reconstruct or revise constructs. In Gestalt therapy, similarly, the task is to own denied and less used aspects of the personality.

Kelly's fixed-role enactment is akin to Gestalt's reversal technique. The author has reservations concerning the feasibility of writing a fixed-role sketch: to mention one difficulty, it would require the ability to discriminate subtle differences and similarities.

In Kelly's approach the individual becomes the <u>opposite</u> polarity or polarities. Gestalt, in contrast, works alternately with <u>each</u> pole of the polarity continuum. The energy flows from pole to pole of both polarities until the poles melt into an assimilating middle point.

Our contemporaries Bandler and Grinder have studied the role of language in the integrating of polarities or, in their words, the achieving of congruity. Their approach is discussed in the next and final section of this chapter.

Bandler and Grinder

Richard Bandler and John Grinder (1975,1976) use linguistics as a basis for a theory and technique of therapy. In their two-volume work, The Structure of Magic, they draw on the work of Bateson, Watzlawick, Milton Erickson, Haley, Satir, and the early linguistic researchers Korzybsky and Vaihinger. The techniques of Bandler and Grinder were influenced by Gestalt therapy.

Neuro-linguistic programming, the name of their approach, asserts that individuals create "maps" or models of the world. Such models can be rich or, as in the case of persons seeking counselling, impoverished. These models differ from the world as it actually is through the operation of three processes: generalization, deletion, and distortion.

Generalization is illustrated in the statement, "Nobody pays any attention to what I say" (the words "nobody" and "what" lack a reference).

Deletion is the process by which attention is given to some aspects of experience while others are excluded. Examples of deletion are: "I feel happy" (about whom/what); "You always talk" (to me) "as though you're mad" (at someone).

Distortion is present in the person who at some time has been rejected and makes the generalization that he's not worth caring for. As his model has this generalization, he either deletes caring messages or reinterprets them as insincere (Bandler and Grinder, 1975, p.16).

The language through which an individual expresses himself

exhibits a map or maps. In therapy the individual's generalizations, deletions, and distortions are challenged with the aim of changing the individual's map. Any change in his model opens the person to more choices in his behavior.

Persons represent their experience, according to Bandler and Grinder, in typical (most valued) ways called representational systems. The client uses his representational systems in organizing his experience. A person's representational system may be visual, kinesthetic, auditory, gustatory, or olfactory. The therapist attempts to identify which system the client uses. Having decided which is the client's favored system the therapist might respond "I see (feel, hear) what you are saying."

The client communicates by words, posture, voice tone, and gestures. When these "output channels" give the same message there is congruent communication. Incongruity exists when the two messages are different. In incongruency the messages are incompatible and others experience the person as confused, inconsistent, and untrustworthy.

In responding to incongruency the therapist's task is to assist the client toward integration. Bandler and Grinder give the following description of the integration process:

> The therapist's task in working with a client's incongruencies is to assist the client in changing by integrating the parts of the client which are in conflict, the incongruencies which are draining his energies and blocking him from getting what he wants. Typically, when a client has parts which are in conflict, no part is successful, but each sabotages the others' efforts to achieve what they want. Within a client who has conflicting parts, there are (at least) two incompatible models or maps of the world. As these models both serve as a guide for the client's behavior and are incompatible, his

> behavior is, itself, inconsistent. Integration is a process by which the client creates a new model of the world which includes both of the formerly incompatible models in such a way that they are coordinated and function smoothly together, both working to assist the client in getting what he wants from life. (1976, p.44)

The authors propose three phases in working with incongruities: identifying, sorting, and integrating.

The identification or detection of incongruities requires the therapist to use his senses, visual, auditory, touching, to check whether the several messages (paramessages) presented simultaneously by the client are congruent or incongruent. Incongruity can be indicated by a statement such as, "I really want to change the way I act in public," a statement which may imply a "but" added at the end. Encouraging the client to fill in the second half of the sentence following the "but" may provide a message whose meaning is different from the first (i.e. incongruity).

Once incongruity has been detected (identified) the therapist sorts the conflicting messages into congruent parts or polarities. Sorting is the second phase of incongruity work. The therapist uses spatial sorting (empty chair technique), fantasy, psychodrama, and sorting using the Satir categories of placating, blaming, computing, and distracting. The principle is (1) to convert the client's incongruities into polarities, and (2) to achieve congruency within each polarity.

Often one polarity will be less fully expressed. Having the client exaggerate the polarity, or having the therapist play the stronger one, will result in a fuller expression of the weaker polarity.

The third step of incongruity work, the integrating phase, involves contact and integration. Contact is achieved by having the client's polarities expressed in a common representational system, say, visual.

The final stage of the sequence is integration of the two parts. The goal is to give the client a map which will include both the previous (conflicting) models. The authors report a case where the client had a kinesthetic-placating part of himself and a visual-blaming part. With his eyes closed he was asked to imagine or see the parts, one in each hand. As he brought his hands slowly together he was urged to notice the parts changing into one. Through this ritual the person achieved integration of his polarities (1976, pp.186-188). In integration the client obtains "a single, unified map for his behavior, allowing him the choices he desires from each of the formerly conflicting polarities" (1976, p.95).

In their work with communication theory Bandler and Grinder have made an impressive contribution to counselling theory and practice. Their explication of the process of polarity integration, and the development of a variety of techniques for achieving integration, are likely to have high utility in counselling.

The theorists discussed in this chapter view polarity integration in a similar way to that of Gestalt therapy as well exhibiting some differences. All see existence as bipolar. Jung and Kelly agree with Perls that development can be one-sided. Jung and Perls share the notion that there is a push from imbalance toward balance.

Jung, Kelly and Perls were interested in the denied, split-off

aspects of personality (Jung's shadow). They believed that the task of therapy was to bring these disowned aspects into awareness. For Jung, awareness of the shadow side of personality makes possible the discovering of a balancing midpoint--called in Gestalt the center, the outcome of assimilation.

The Gestalt view that polarities oppose and war against each other (experienced as conflict by the individual) was shared by Heraclitus and Jung. They agreed with Gestalt therapy that the allowing of polarities to conflict openly can result in harmony and a new freedom of choice.

Of the views of these theorists, Kelly's fixed-role construct theory is the most different from Gestalt. Jung's principle of opposites, and ideas associated with this principle, is the position that appears to be most closely related to Gestalt's integrating of polarities.

This chapter has attempted to show that the Gestalt theory and practice of polarity integration, while in some ways uniquely Gestaltist, reflects a perspective that is shared by others. Though lacking explicit formulation in the mainstream of current personality theory, bipolarity has not been without witness.

This study is a modest attempt by the author in the direction of correcting contemporary psychology's relative neglect of bipolarity.

The next chapter is an attempt to deepen our understanding of Gestalt therapy's integrating of polarities by explicating the theoretical perspectives.

CHAPTER III

INTEGRATING POLARITIES IN GESTALT THEORY

The purpose of this chapter is to explicate the integrating of polarities according to Gestalt theory. The practice of Gestalt work with polarities will be dealt with in chapter IV.

All therapies contain assumptions about what constitutes psychological health and psychological disturbance. Before looking at Perls' theory of personality change through polarity integration, the author will briefly discuss Perls' view of healthy and unhealthy personality.

Following these introductory sections the theory of the integrating of polarities will be set forth, beginning with Perls' theory of cure. This topic will be followed by the author's discussion of the three phases of the process of integrating polarities: (1) differentiation, (2) identification, and (3) assimilation.

Unhealthy Personality

The unhealthy personality lacks integration. The unhealthy person is made up of parts which are discordant with each other. Symptoms are created and maintained by one part of the personality refusing to accept the other part. He experiences conflict within himself, one part the victim of the other. Freud described such conflict as being like two servants quarrelling all day long; little productive work gets done.

The unhealthy personality is likely to be one-sided, with one part

demonstrating an exaggerated presence with its opposite suppressed. The one-sided imbalance can be compared to a magnetic field where only one pole is working. Perls' biography (1969b) owes much of its appeal to his willingness to admit, and at times berate, his (one-sided) arrogance, an aspect of his personality of which he was acutely concious, that continued to defy integration. His feeling of being ten feet tall he saw as essentially compensation for inner feelings of unworthiness (1969b, p.3).

The less healthy person has parts that are disowned as "ego-alien" (in contrast to acceptable, "ego-syntonic" aspects) (Zinker, 1977, p.197).

The uneasy alignment of opposing opposites is achieved at the expense of excitement and loss of energy.

The healthy person has good contact: the capacity of the total organism to use its natural sensory and motor endowment to achieve homeostasis within its organism/environment field. Psychological disturbance occurs when the natural contacting process is habitually interrupted by projection, retroflection, introjection, and confluence.

Projection is the mechanism by which one makes others responsible for what originates in the self. It involves a disowning of one's impulses, desires and behaviors and placing what belongs to the self outside.

Retroflection is the holding back of an expression and doing to self what was originally intended for the environment. The retroflector may, for example, hold back impulses to express anger, to cry, or to attack.

Introjection is the taking in of ways of acting, feeling, and evaluating from significant others which have not been assimilated. Introjects are foreign bodies in the personality. The topdog's "shoulds" are introjections.

In confluence the individual experiences no boundary between himself and his environment. In therapy, when empathy for the client has become identification with him we have confluence. Confluence makes healthy contact and withdrawal impossible since both presuppose an other. Confluent parents consider their children as extensions of themselves and refuse to allow them to be different.

To summarize:

> The introjector does as others would like him to do, the projector does unto others what he accuses them of doing to him, the man in pathological confluence doesn't know who is doing what to whom, and the retroflector does to himself what he would like to do to others. (Perls, 1976, p.40)

The unhealthy personality makes extensive use of these defense mechanisms. Their purpose is avoidance (avoidance of contact with the environment and with self) and, except in real danger, is seldom of benefit.

To each new situation as it arises a healthy person gives different responses. The pathological individual responds inflexibly, his responses emerging from a fixed self-concept. Naranjo (1975), describing the constricting nature of a rigid self-concept, wrote, "We live only in a fragment of ourselves, holding on to a pre-established self-image and rejecting as non-self all that is conflicting with it or that we expect to be painful" (p.41).

Whereas the healthy person is fulfilling, or attempting to

fulfill, his needs, the unhealthy person doesn't know what he needs. And, therefore, doesn't know what to do to satisfy his needs. His ignorance of his needs is a function of incomplete awareness; the emerging figure of hunger or loneliness or the desire to reach out to another is experienced unclearly if at all.

When a need is genuinely satisfied, the figure-background situation changes; there is closure. In the unhealthy personality there are a great number of unfinished situations. Unfinished business withholds resources that are needed if one is to live fully.

Unable to avail himself of his own resources, the unhealthy individual manipulates his environment to meet his needs. He settles for environmental support in place of self support. Thorne (1974) asserted that the price for manipulation is dependency:

> In the course of growing up, the child learns to manipulate his environment by playing certain roles (such as helpless, cry baby, etc.). The price he pays is dependency, for instead of developing his own resources, he tries to control others to get what he needs. He disowns his own power and projects it onto them, then depends on them to affirm his self worth. (p.31)

Perls (1969b) elaborated the nature of manipulative dependency in the following lines:

> I call neurotic any man
> Who uses his potential to
> Manipulate the others
> Instead of growing up himself....
> He thinks he's lost without a help.
> He sucks you in, he uses you
> Unheeding your requirements.
> Manipulating others is an art
> Which he acquires early.
> He plays some roles, selected well
> To domineer the others who believe him. (pp.19-20)

In place of growing, energy is invested in role playing.

In his posthumous work, The Gestalt Approach, Perls masterfully

described the ills of modern man:

> Modern man lives in a state of low-grade vitality. . . . knows little of true creative living. Instead of it, he has become an anxious automaton. His world offers him vast opportunities for enrichment and enjoyment, and he wanders around aimlessly, not really knowing what he wants and completely unable, therefore, to figure out how to get it. . . .He goes through a lot of motions, but the expression on his face indicates his lack of any real interest in what he is doing. . .. He seems to have lost all spontaneity. . . .He spends endless time trying either to recapture the past or to mold the future. His present activities are merely bothersome chores he has to get out of the way. At times, he is not even aware of his actions at the moment. (p.xi)

Man can live a richer, fuller life. The author now turns to Perls' view of healthy functioning.

Healthy Personality

From the Gestalt perspective the main principle of effective functioning is that of organismic self-regulation. The basic law of organismic regulation is that the figure-ground formation which is strongest at a given time will control the organism. From organismic self-regulation comes belief in one's own capacities: one trusts oneself. One's own organism is the basis of one's identifications rather than obedience to shoulds from outside (introjects) which result in the alienation of large parts of oneself.

The thrust is toward inner directedness, toward self support, toward listening (a la Thoreau) to a different drummer--oneself.

The healthy personality is ever assimilating additional parts of self. An important aspect of self support is that the individual is able to facilitate his own growth (Perls, 1976, p.181). Just as the

draining of water through a hole in the snow enlarges the hole, so the "trickling" of integration facilitates its own development (Perls, 1948, p.572).

There is in health a togetherness or centeredness, however temporary, that echoes what Emerson called harmonious "correspondence," by which he meant that the potentially contradictory thought and act have gotten together (Sisk, 1980). Through the experiencing of all parts of self, with no parts disowned, the range of possibilities is enriched. Stated another way, the healthy person's awareness can develop, without blocking, wherever his organismic attention is drawn.

Above all, the healthy person has the ability to live in the present. Rather than brooding on the regrets of the past, or avoiding the difficulties of the present by being anxious about the future, he lives in the present.

I now turn to the Gestalt theory of cure, to be followed by the phases of the process of integrating polarities, differentiation, identification, and assimilation.

Theory of Cure

In Gestalt therapy the troubled individual is seen as presenting symptoms which arise from aspects of himself which he experiences as contradictory. Saint Paul gave expression to the pain of this condition when he wrote, "The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (Romans7:19).

What the individual experiences as anxiety, loneliness, arrogance, frustration, and other like feelings, his therapist will view as (1)

understandable and healthy responses, as, for example, grief arising out of the recent loss of a loved one; or, (2) manifestations of interference in functioning brought about largely through the denial of aspects of self.

Incompatible aspects of self can align themselves into polarities--strong-weak, love-hate, fear-wish--incompatible and contradictory. If energy flows readily from one pole to the other, there will be spontaneity and lively excitement. Instead, very often there is "stuckness," rigidity, and rejection of one pole. R.D. Laing's (1969) The Divided Self describes how the ontologically insecure person, fearing engulfment, withdraws to (the polarity) isolation. Instead of having the choice of separatedness and relatedness based on individual autonomy, the person finds himself trapped between the complete loss of his being by absorption in the other person (engulfment) and complete aloneness (isolation) (p.44). An individual in this situation is preoccupied with preserving his very existence rather than gratifying himself--a grim task.

More commonly (than the stuck one-sided split of Laing's isolated individual) the conflicted individual exhibits an identification-alienation pattern (Perls, 1948, p.574). In this pattern the person identifies himself with certain emotions, ideas, and actions but says "No!" to others. He holds to certain parts of himself and cuts himself off from other parts. He lacks integration (perhaps he could be called unintegrated) for not all his functions are available to him. He settles for one part of himself while the other part is suppressed. But pushing part of oneself underground doesn't work. It can sabotage

the apparently winning side through guilt, low energy, joylessness and other self-defeating manoeuvers. The suppressed part can inconveniently make its appearance. In W.C. Fields' comedy when the little kid sees through the con man's phony arrangements and Fields says, "Go away kid, ya bother me," it didn't work and it doesn't work in our daily attempts to con ourselves either (Polster & Polster, 1973, p.247).

Much of the conflicted individual's misery is rooted in a belief in either/or. I believe myself to be either a saint or a devil, either weak or strong, either this or that, rather than realizing that both are dualities, aspects of the same phenomenon and not irreconcilable contradictions. A person may both love and hate his mother from one moment to another--and, perhaps, in the same moment--and the reconciliation of this apparent paradox lies in the possibility of finding some common ground, some unifying factor.

Perls expressed the goal of therapy to be "the reestablishment of the self by integrating the dissociated parts of the personality" (1976, p.70). The integrating of these dissociated or discordant aspects of self is brought about through a self-disclosing confrontation.

Getting in touch with the other pole, or both poles, triggers tension bringing an energizing: "Every process," said Jung (1966), "is a phenomenon of energy. . .all energy can proceed only from the tension of opposites" (p.29).

As one is confronted with a troubled client, one may ask, What have I to work with? Apart from the therapist's own resources, what does the client bring?

There are always forces in the client that push toward integration, toward growth. It is these with which the therapist allies himself. Without them he would be powerless. Instead of Freud's view that transference is the vehicle for change, Perls came to rely on the potential dynamic of the unfinished situation. Perls held that transference, with its emphasis upon the past, was missing. He asserted, "What is active in therapy is not what has been: on the contrary, it is precisely what has not been--a deficit of something missed" (1976, p.57). It is this, the push for closure, the moving toward wholeness and the unity of configuration, with which the therapist has to work.

Another way of looking at the push for closure is to recognize that polarities not only oppose each other but also attract and seek one another. The exact forces that split and fragment the personality also seek integration of the personality. This ambivalence can be noted in the fear-wish interaction where that which is feared may be also, in some way, desired.

Differentiation

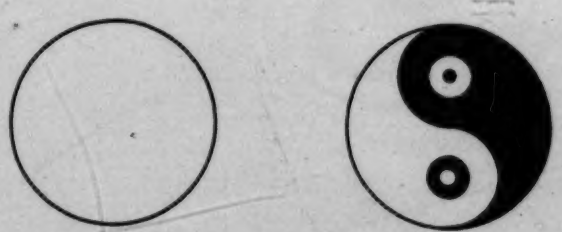
The integrating of polarities is one of the central aims of Gestalt therapy. In the initial chapter of his first book, Perls set forth the concept of differential thinking: thinking in opposites. He had acquired this idea from Friedlander, indicating the importance that the notion of opposites held for him at the time. He was later to stand by his early position saying he had "nothing to add to the first chapter of Ego, Hunger, and Aggression" (1969b, p.76). Yet,

strangely, the word polarities is infrequently found in the indices of his works. (See comment on omissions in indices by Fantz, 1975, p.87).

By "differentiation" Gestaltists refer to the separating out of the parts present in a troubled emotional state. Differentiation means, literally, the acquiring of a distinct character. Differentiation has to do with the distinguishing of the two or more parts.

As these parts are more and more vividly experienced, they will frequently be experienced as not only different--in the sense of unalike, not the same--but also as contradictory opposites. For instance, a husband, troubled about his marriage, might experience both love and hate toward his wife.

There may be no clear (differentiated) feelings present. Chaos, in the Genesis account of creation, is an instance of an undifferentiated state. (The Chinese call undifferentiation or predifference Wu Chi and represent it by a circle; differentiation into opposites is symbolized by the Chinese Tai Chi and Yin Yang.) (See figure 2)



Wu Chi Tai Chi

Figure 2

(Perls, 1947, p.18)

Gestaltists typically encourage the individual to stay with this unclear feeling, with the "fertile void." As one stays with his void with full awareness a foreground (pole) will emerge. Shuttling back and forth in awareness from pole to pole will sharpen the differentiation. Differentiation can be viewed as the separating of the possibilities into opposites, into poles.

Perls spoke of the undifferentiated or predifference state as a zero-point. He said, "Every event is related to a zero-point from which a differentiation into opposites takes place" (1947, p.15). For example, an organism at zero-point or homeostasis experiences neither pleasure nor pain. When its balance is interrupted it experiences either pleasure or pain (which are opposites). Although opposites, the two are more closely related to each other than to any other experience. Therefore, learning about pleasure is one way to learn about pain (Stewart, 1974, p.14). Gestalt work is characterized by an alertness to the potential presence of a midpoint, a centre, that is the source of the warring opposites the client is experiencing.

Through "creative indifference" (the title of Friedlander's book) Gestaltists look at opposites with detachment toward either pole but with high interest in the dichotomy, in the zero-point, and in the process of differentiation (Stewart, p.14). One aspect of creative indifference was reflected in Perls' aim to avoid establishing himself as a transference figure, as in Freudian psychoanalysis, but instead to maintain a role of creative indifference in which he could cultivate emerging polarities and facilitate the individual's return to his own center (mid-point). "Creative indifference," Perls explained,

"is full of interest, extending to both sides of the differentiation" (1947, p.19).

A current theorist aptly sets forth the theory of differentiation as follows:

> The Gestalt approach is to experience fully, which oftentimes means getting in touch with primary, undifferentiated feeling, and then progressively differentiating the feeling until both of the poles are recognized. Through such a process. . .one can learn that opposites within the same context are more closely related than either of the opposites is to any other concept. . . .And herein lies a paradox--the likeness of the not alike. (Smith, 1976, p.33)

Perls echoed the likeness of the not alike in his statement that "opposites show in their specific context a great affinity to each other" (1947, p.15).

Identification

All impoverishment of the personality comes about through self-alienation: a disowning of parts of ourselves by repression or projection. The opposite of alienation is "identification with." In the integrating of polarities the aim is to achieve a re-owning (identification) of the dis-owned or alienated pole. Identification is the bringing of the split-off polarity back to the self so that the self re-owns, accepts, all its urgings and sensations.

We achieve identification of polarities by playing or becoming each polarity. Contact is then furthered through dialogue (a self-disclosing confrontation) between the polarities.

Something of the importance of identification is conveyed in Kempler's (1973) statement that "coming 'to know' one's own psychological polarizations is the first step toward psychological

integration and consequently a higher state of awareness" (p.251). The goal of Gestalt therapy is to get the right and left hand knowing what the other is doing (Enright in Kogan, 1976, p.747).

We wish to restore contact between the opposed forces. As contact is restored the warring forces may experience each other as valid participants and begin to work as allies rather than as foes. Commonly, once contact has been restored, the person will discover that the distrusted part or parts had many redeeming features; the enemy has become a friend. As the Polsters (1973) have written, "Growth depends on the renewal of contact possibilities between diverse aspects of the individual--contact possibilities which have been shut off through erroneous ideas of incompatibility" (p.67).

At some stage the client will typically experience confusion, being stuck, and the like. The person needs to achieve a sense of identification with all his actions, including his self-interruptions. We must break into his self-manipulations, his ways of avoiding total involvement. A situation can only be finished when the client is totally involved in it. It may be useful for the client to complete the phrase "I am preventing/interrupting myself by _____."

The wide-open experiencing of oneself, come what may, no matter what terrors may be imagined, can be invaluable. A well-known novelist expressed the same idea in a recent interview when he "contrasted the 'central corridor' from which the average person rarely strays, to the writer's drive to 'open every door, look under every bed. . .no matter how frightening that room may be'" (Uris, 1980).

In identification the unknown becomes known. The conflict which

was hidden is made actively open. That which was not-self becomes self, me, I.

Assimilation

In Ego, Hunger, and Aggression and Gestalt Therapy Perls had explored the alimentary tract as a figure for psychological experiencing. In later writings he and others said less about this aspect of his thinking, relatively neglecting such topics as the hanging-on bite and other references to eating. One aspect of the eating figure continues to be prominent in the literature, namely, assimilation.

Fritz saw the chewing and digesting of one's food as a model for the way one chews, assimilates, and integrates knowledge and information from the world. As food is assimilated through a process of chewing and digesting, so experience can be taken in and become part of the self. Or, similarly, as food can be swallowed whole, later causing disturbance, or spit out, so experience can be swallowed whole or in chunks (i.e. introjected) and remain unassimilated. Perls felt that much of Freud's superego could be seen as introjections, statements inadequately assimilated, experienced as not-self by the self, which needed to be brought into awareness (regurgitated), rechewed, and either spit out or digested so that the experience could become truly the organism's.[3]

The final phase in the integrating of polarities process is assimilation. By assimilation is meant the emergence of a unity, a homeostasis. The polarities, having given up their either-or fight

for control, are now reconciled in a both-and. There is closure. The person is centered.

Assimilation, as will be seen more fully in the succeeding chapter, is likely to have the character of uniqueness and surprise for both the client and the therapist. More than the sum of the parts, the solution emerges in a manner that has the quality of the unexpected. Similarly, Rychlak (1973), talking generally about dialectical discourse, speaks of working dialectically so that one arrives at new insights which were not predictable at the outset (p.6).

Assimilation brings closure to unfinished business, inclusion to the alienated and disowned, a new unity that subsumes the previously contradictory. Nothing is destroyed nor rejected as a new gestalt is formed. The Polsters(1973) reported an interview in which a woman who had had a dialogue between her big and little sides asks to be held by the therapist. The interview concludes:

> Patient: I feel more relaxed right now that I have ever been.
> Therapist: Do you feel <u>big</u> or <u>little</u> right now?
> Patient: I don't feel little. . .I don't feel like a baby. But I don't feel big either. I mean, I don't feel like I have to act big and pretend I don't want to be held. . .I. . .<u>That's</u> the baloney! I can be big and still want to be held! (pp.250-251)

A new gestalt had emerged.[4]

If assimilation is the final phase in integrating polarities, we will use the term "integration" to signify the overall outcome. Integration is that state of unity and wholeness which is achieved through the integrating of previously opposing, seemingly contradictory parts of the organism. Perls felt there was no end to integration: there is always something that can be assimilated and

integrated. There is always a chance for growing.

The therapy is completed at the point when the person has reached that "state of integration which facilitates its own development" (Perls, 1948, p.585). The person is now able to resume his own growth.

Some practitioners, impressed by the seeming ease of using Gestalt techniques and their often dramatic effectiveness, have neglected the theoretical aspects of the approach. This chapter has attempted to provide this underpinning.

Theory can be essentially an academic exercise having only academic significance. Therapeutic theory will have little influence on therapeutic practice without a means of implementation. The techniques of Gestalt therapy provide that means.

In the next chapter the author discusses Gestalt therapeutic techniques and their use in facilitating the integrating of polarities.

CHAPTER IV

INTEGRATING POLARITIES IN GESTALT THERAPY

Anyone who has tried to use Gestalt methods in a therapeutic situation has experienced difficulties. The work of the best Gestalt practitioners appears so mysterious, so dramatic in its results, that these persons have been looked upon as magicians and, in the words of Bandler and Grinder, "charismatic superstars."

Perls believed that his skills were teachable. A sizeable number of audiotapes and films were produced by him and others in the conviction that the theory and skills of Gestalt therapy could be understood and learned by others.

Excerpts from films of Perls conducting dream workshops are to be found in the appendices. A reading of case notes lacks the immediacy of being present in the session. Nevertheless, a reading may (1) convey a sense of the situation that confronts a therapist as he is doing therapy; and (2) assist recognition of the phases of integrating polarities (differentiation, identification, assimilation) and understanding of the techniques used in polarity integration--skills making up what Perls called the art of polarizing.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore some of the principal therapeutic methods used by Gestaltists. Their general application will be discussed. Illustration of their use in polarity integration will also be noted.

The methods have been grouped loosely under the headings (1) basic modes of Gestalt therapy and (2) techniques of Gestalt therapy.

The basic mode section will discuss groups, awareness continuum, dreams, fertile void, impasse, and the topdog-underdog split, The section on techniques will include the empty chair and several additional Gestalt methods for facilitating the therapeutic process.

The author begins with the basic modes of Gestalt therapy.

The Basic Modes of Gestalt Therapy

Group

Perls preferred to work in a group setting. His work in groups might be more accurately described as individual therapy in a group setting. While the Gestalt therapist works with a group member the rest of the group members function like a Greek chorus, bringing consensus to the proceedings. The therapist's interactions with one group member stimulate other group members to do their own work. In practice, Gestaltists work with individuals in one-to-one settings as well as in groups.

Awareness Continuum

Awareness is the basic principle of Gestalt therapy. Perls declared that "awareness per se--by and of itself--can be curative" (1969a, p.16).

To be aware is to pay attention to the perpetually emerging foreground of one's own perception.

In the awareness continuum the individual is encouraged to simply be aware (notice) from moment to moment what he is experiencing. He may be asked, "What is happening now?" or, "What are you aware of now?" Through the continuum of awareness the individual is in touch

with the flow of his experiencing from moment to moment.

If the individual can allow his awareness to flow (without fleeing when an unpleasant sensation begins to emerge) then the conflicting feelings, the resistances, the suppressed aspects will emerge into awareness. As these separate out (differentiate) they may begin to show themselves as opposites.[5]

Dreams

Perls was a genius at working with dreams. He called dreams "the royal road to integration." He saw dreams as our most spontaneous activity, activity in which we present material beyond our control and outside our awareness (the unconcious). Perls held that a dream contains an existential message: each part of the dream is a projection of the individual's personality.

The process of dream work involves having the individual be (identify with)each aspect of the dream. The person is asked to play people, a road, himself flying, or whatever he reports, according to the principle that as he becomes parts of himself, he gradually acknowledges and re-owns them as him. Each item assimilated is an increase in potential and the beginning of change.

In hearing an audiotape of Naranjo (undated) working with a dream one notes that the therapist directs the exploration of the dream but avoids interpretation. In that dream Naranjo directed the dreamer to play a dog, the dog's insides, a little boy, a good boy, his mother, and so on, having dialogues between these aspects and expressing his awareness of feelings from time to time. The dialogues have the purpose of achieving contact between dissociated aspects of

the dream in order that these parts may be re-owned (identified). In the Naranjo tape the outcome was that the individual got in touch with (and worked through) feelings of disgust.

Dream work may involve the emergence of a series of polarities. In Jane's dream (in Frederick Perls and Gestalt Therapy - Appendix D) mother Jane (nonblaming side) interacts with daughter (guilty side). Presently this action assimilates in the statement "the inevitable can't be avoided." Later a new split emerges comprising a computer pole and an angry pole. As contact is furthered (particularly through listening) these opponents melt into the assimilation represented in the statement, "Help me, but don't run me." The action concludes with the dreamer experiencing feelings she describes as "lovely. . . warm. . .beautiful." She has found her zero-centre, integration.

Fertile Void

The fertile void is an emotional state which is experienced as emptiness, lostness, or confusion. In working with polarities the individual is encouraged to "stay with" the confusion. The feeling may differentiate into opposites. Instead of avoiding the confusion by talking or intellectualizing, staying with the confusion will allow other feelings to emerge.

A woman client of the author's allowed herself to experience her confusion. She presently reported that she now felt relaxed--a lighter feeling.

Impasse

The experience of being stuck is called an impasse. Typically the person experiences helplessness. He believes himself incapable of

coping. Asked to re-enact the scene of her husband's dying, a widow became upset, anxious, and angry with me. Her impasse was marked by the characteristic catastrophic expectations, expectations which Perls felt were mostly fantasy.[6]

The impasse may refer to a point in dialogue work or may refer more generally to being at an impasse in one's life: a person may be "settling for" the status quo of a mediocre marriage or mediocre aliveness.

Ruth Cohn indicates the relation of impasse and conflicting polarities in saying,

> The skillful separation of conflicts into their duality and their subsequent reenactment leads, after a series of dialogues, to feelings of blankness, confusion, helplessness, etc. This experience is the impasse: the ultimate expression of two strivings pulling in opposite directions. (1970, p.137)

The experience of hopelessness and confusion is a common aspect of conflict resolution and indicates movement toward the impasse. The client who says, "I don't know what to say," can be directed to make the statement to the other polarity.

How is the impasse overcome? If one becomes fully aware of the impasse, it will collapse, and one will find himself suddenly through it (Perls, 1970, p.26).

Topdog-Underdog Split

A part of the personality that speaks the "shoulds" Perls called the topdog: the conscience that says, "I should...," "I ought...," "I ought not..." Corresponding roughly to Freud's superego, the topdog is a moralizer, a righteous bully, a judge that directs, commands and scolds (the underdog). Perls saw this part of the personality as

essentially a bundle of introjected standards and attitudes. The top-dog's function is to maintain the status quo.

While the topdog is trying to control with shoulds and threats the underdog is responding with can'ts and helplessness. The underdog makes excuses, postpones, and sabotages the topdog's directives. Perls held that the underdog generally wins the tug of war but it proves to be a sour victory: a part of the personality has stopped another part from doing something.

The author recalls a counselling situation involving a divorcee mother and her two daughters who were in their early teens. All three were experiencing feelings of frustration. The mother saw herself as helpless, weak, and unable to cope. Denying the competence she showed in her work situation, through her underdog position she was immobilizing the family, and was withstanding the resentment expressed by her daughters. It was a vivid illustration of the power of "weakness," the destructive potential of Perls' underdog.

Like the belief that one should be thoroughly competent and adequate (called by Albert Ellis an irrational idea) the topdog plays a self-torture game, demanding the impossible, saying, "Come on now, live up to your highest expectations."

Perls' way of working with the topdog-underdog dichotomy was to get a dialogue going between the two. Typically neither listens at first, perhaps because one of them is an introject which needs to be digested or spit out. The person tends, furthermore, to live primarily from one of the components. The aim of the dialogue is to get these aspects to make contact with one another, primarily through hearing,

in order that they may give up the fight for control and, in so doing, permit the emergence of an integration. The tug of war between the discordant topdog and underdog opposites disappears and allows for the emergence of a unified whole.

The self-critical statement, "I am so angry with myself," is an indication of a topdog-underdog conflict. The therapist would draw the client's attention to the conflict situation, suggesting that the conflict is between two parts, a self-critical aspect and the part that is apparently not OK. As the client is encouraged to express his anger toward the not-OK part, the conflict will be brought out into the open, making possible movement toward an integration.

Perls (1975a) recounted a fascinating session involving the topdog-underdog conflict:

> To illustrate the method of integrating top-and underdogs by working through a dream, I relate a case of a patient who impressed everybody with his psychotic eccentricities. During one of my group sessions he related a dream in which he saw a young man enter a library, throw books about, shout and scream. When the librarian, an elderly spinster, rebuked him, he reacted with continued erratic behavior. In desperation the librarian summoned the police.
>
> I directed my patient to act out and experience the encounter between the boy (underdog) and the librarian and police (topdogs). In the beginning the confrontation was belligerent and uselessly consuming of time and energy. After participating in the hostile encounter for two hours, the different parts of my patient were able to stop fighting and listen to each other. True listening <u>is</u> understanding. He came to recognize that by playing "crazy" he could outwit his topdog, because the irresponsible person is not punished. Following this successful integration the patient no longer needed to act crazy in order to be spontaneous. As a result he is now a freer and more amenable person. (pp.6-7)

The healing of the topdog-underdog split is a matter of timing,

of heeding nonverbal cues, and, perhaps most importantly, seeking to cooperate with emerging figures rather than trying to make anything happen.

The topdog-underdog split is the last of what I have called the basic modes of Gestalt therapy. The rest of the chapter will be concerned with what I have chosen to call the techniques of Gestalt therapy. In working with polarities the techniques have the immediate function of restoring contact between the opposed forces.

The Techniques of Gestalt Therapy

Empty Chair

The empty chair is a literal or figurative chair in which the individual imagines a part of himself (or another person) in that chair and then has a dialogue with that part. The method is appropriately used following a client statement indicating a conflict, a split. The individual is asked to address the occupant of the empty chair, then occupy the empty chair, and, taking on the role of the occupant of that chair, to answer back. The technique is highly effective in enhancing awareness of feelings associated with each part and in bringing about contact between the parts, necessary conditions for the achievement of assimilation.

For example, a person might be attempting to make a decision about leaving school:

> Client: I don't know whether to stay in school or get a job. I just can't make up my mind.
>
> Counsellor: You're torn between school and work. Let's try something. It seems like there are two sides of you--a part

that wants to stay at school and a part that wants to work. Let's have the two sides talk to each other. Are you willing to try this? Which side do you feel most like now?

Client: O.K. I feel like the part that wants to take a job.

Counsellor: From that chair describe yourself, what you're like and what you want.

Client (P1): I'm the part that wants to take a job. I like money, I'm outgoing and I like challenge.

Counsellor: Will you change and now be the other part. What are you like?

(P2): I'm cautious and well-prepared. I want to be safe with the security of a degree.

Counsellor: What do you say to the other part?

(P2): Don't be foolish. Don't risk your future. How do you know that the job will develop into something later?

(P1): I'm sick and tired of waiting. I want to try myself. I like the job and the freedom of having some money.

Counsellor: Are you aware of what you're doing with your hands and arms?

(P1): No.

Counsellor: You were going like this (Counsellor mirrors movement of pushing). Do this some more.

(P1): I'm pushing away.

Counsellor: What are you pushing away?

(P1): I'm tired of stodginess. I want to break free.

Counsellor: Continue this dialogue. What does this part say?
(Greenberg & Kahn, 1978, p.24)

In the above encounter feelings were clarified and enhanced through the client's describing himself in each polarity. The dialogue promoted contact between the two sides. Having the client push and attend to his pushing helped him get more directly in touch with his urge to "break free."

The dialogue can take place without the individual changing his seat. The author prefers having the person move from chair to chair for this helps to keep the counsellor clear about which position is being spoken from at a given moment.

Following an initial few words from the therapist, frequently the dialogue will proceed of its own momentum with minimal assistance from the therapist other than to suggest changing seats. In other instances, the attentive skills of the therapist will be crucial.

Joen Fagan (1974) has listed seven principles for directing empty chair work: (1) Have personal experience as a client before beginning. (2) Be ready for explosions or strong emotional responses. (3) Be sure you can provide follow-up support and that the client is relatively healthy emotionally. Not being able to resolve the conflict can be frustrating, and could be damaging to a fragile person whose anxiety is threatening to overwhelm his defenses. (4) Keep the interventions to a minimum as long as the process is moving. (5) Move gently through impasses. Be satisfied with small steps rather than going for big break-throughs. (6) If uncertain about what the person is saying or doing, find out. (7) Experiment. Follow your own experience and intuition. Without this freedom of functioning, the experience may turn out to be a dry run! (In the author's view, principles one, four, and seven are particularly worthy of emphasis.)

There are a variety of situations where the empty chair technique can be useful. For instance, Gorag (1974) has reported the use of the empty chair in the treatment of stuttering. In having the stutterer imagine the stuttering part of him in the empty chair the clinician

makes use of a primitive belief of stutterers, that their stutter is a foreign element in the body. In interpreting results of vocational interest inventories the empty chair has been used to facilitate exploration of the person's self-concept and decision-making style (Sodetz & Vinitsky, 1977).

In the integrating of polarities the empty chair is eminently useful in bringing about contact between, and the re-owning of, alienated parts.

In the empty chair technique Gestalt therapy has contributed a powerful tool to the therapeutic portfolio.

Nonverbal Cues

A skillful Gestalt therapist primarily heeds nonverbal communication, rather than responding to the content of the client's utterances. A shrug, posture, voice tone and inflection, a grimace, are signs signalling feelings, resistance, or a state of mind, often at variance from the words.

Perls was an astute observer (Shepard, 1975, pp.21, 99-100). The psychologist Van Dusen judged that observation was "his greatest skill and it partly came from his utter detachment" (Shepard, p.100) On one occasion Van Dusen was about to introduce Perls to the nearly two dozen psychiatric staff at a hospital meeting. Instead, Perls approached each in turn describing what he could see in each person. His descriptions of each one so accurately reflected their life and character that everyone was shaken (p.99). Perls' observational skills had been honed through his early theatrical experiences in Germany, his body work with Reich, and his suspicion about the veracity of words.

Perls warned that words are more subject to self-deception than is nonverbal communication. While the client was busy with words (using them to avoid the risk of the ongoing encounter) Perls was alert to nonverbal cues that might reveal incongruencies and inconsistencies.

Incongruity between word content and nonverbal expression may signal polarity. For example, a person says, "I want to be close to you," said in a loud voice, arms and legs crossed. Incongruity may be present within nonverbal expression, as for instance, the client has one hand reaching out and the other clenched. Dialogue between the parts will facilitate awareness and assist differentiation of the polarities.

A therapeutic intervention should build on some present concern of the organism, even though the therapist may have no idea what it is. Usually the intervention is noninterpretive: the therapist asks what is going on or what is he doing?

The therapist adds an extra set of ears and eyes to the client's communication system when he attends to the client's nonverbal communication. As he does so the effectiveness of the client's communication is greatly increased.

Enactment

Instead of talking about events the person may be encouraged to dramatize or role play the situation. Perls said, "It is insufficient merely to recall a past incident, one has to psychodramatically return to it " (1976, p.66). Being the story brings past and future events into the here and now. In the film Madeline's Dream (Appendix C) Perls says to the dreamer, "Be the lake...Lake, tell me

your story."

Acting leads to expanded awareness. An alienated thought, feeling, or movement can be developed, contacted, and assimilated. Instead of the individual observing himself, he is encouraged to merge with his actions and to have them say what they want.

Group members may be enlisted to participate in the dramatization. The author recalls a member of a group who reported himself unable to appropriately respond to what he experienced as a powerful mother-in-law. Several group members, standing, berated him as he sat immobilized and in so doing intensified his awareness of his weak side. In the following week he found the resources to assert himself with her. An instance of differentiation, full awareness of his weak polarity allowed for the emergence of his (previously disowned) strong polarity. (In Jungian terms, the movement from weakness to strength could be understood as an instance of entropy.)

Repetition

When the client utters a line that appears to be important, the therapist will urge, "Say it again. . .Again." The following sequence from a dream demonstrates that repetition can heighten awareness:

Perls: How does the cow respond?

Mary Anne: That cow's kind of beaten down. The cow says, "I don't care--I don't dare gore you like I want to do!"

Perls: Oh-h. Say this again.

M.A.: I don't dare gore you like I want to.

Perls: Say it again.

M.A.: I don't dare gore you like I want to! (Pause) But I want to!

Perls: Now the power part is wanting to open again.
(Perls, 1970, p.208)

Repetition has assisted the client to achieve awareness of her strength.

Repetition is very useful in polarity dialoguing to heighten awareness. In the film Frederick Perls and Gestalt Therapy (Appendix D) Perls has the woman's statement to her computer side, "I don't like you," repeated three times. As her computer side she then answered back, "You'd better listen," four times. Then followed her statement to her computer side, "Help me, but don't run me": through repetition the possibility of an integration began to emerge.

Exaggeration

In addition to repetition, exaggeration can be used to heighten awareness. Supposing a person makes a subtle gesture. The therapist can suggest that he make the movement larger, exaggerate it, and see if in so doing he can get in touch with the feeling. Awareness of an emerging feeling can allow for the subsequent emergence of an opposite feeling or feelings into awareness (the differentiation process).

Reversal

In reversal the person is asked to play the opposite of his present or customary behavior. The shy person might try being exhibitionistic or very assertive. Once, after choosing to play the part of a masculine and strong bear, when asked to choose a creature that would be an opposite the author played a flamingo. In exploring a feminine, dainty, and seemingly fragile part of myself I experienced a sense of new freedom.

A man who was about to be married experimented with trying to

reverse his feelings and, in so doing, discovered that there was a part of him that didn't want to be married.

The usefulness of the reversal technique arises directly from the Gestalt understanding that dialectic and polarities are deeply rooted in organismic functioning. While we are identifying with one mode of functioning its polar opposite, though latent, is surely present.

We live according to our self-image and reject all discrepancies as non-self. The self-image is the figure in the figure-ground relationship involved in all perception. In reversal the client is asked to reverse the figure-ground relationship and to start experiencing himself as the background: not that one is being depressed, but that one depresses himself. As a person senses how he depresses himself he gains the resources to stop doing it.

Reversal can bring about contact with hidden aspects of the personality. Re-owning (identifying) these opposite polarities makes assimilation possible. Each time a disowned part is assimilated the person grows: he increases his potential resources for living.

"May I Feed You A Sentence?"

The therapist may conclude that a particular attitude is implied. He could then say: "May I feed you a sentence? Say it. Just try it on for size." If the client had been complaining that his mother puts him down, the therapist might suggest that he try saying the sentence, "I put myself down." The usual initial reaction to such a suggestion is confusion or rejection. The client tests out his reaction to the sentence. As he does so he increasingly identifies with alien parts of himself and, thereby, assimilates his projections.

Getting in touch and facilitating strong contact with disowned parts of self are important goals in the integrating of polarities. The may-I-give-you-a-line technique is one of the several Gestalt interventions that effectively promote these goals.

For further discussion of these and other techniques for integrating polarities, such as making the rounds, "I have a secret," contact and withdrawal, shuttling, and rehearsal, the reader is referred to Levitsky and Perls (1970).

Describing the methodology of Gestalt work risks oversimplification. There are subtleties that are missed whether one is viewing a film, listening to a tape, or is even present in the session. In doing the research the author discovered that Gestalt therapy is exceedingly complex both in its theory and practice. This complexity was something of a surprise.

A sense of Gestalt's complexity is conveyed in Kempler's (1973) identification of the skills of the therapist as being able to recognize the largest discordant premise at any one time; knowing what are polar opposites; and skill at keeping discordant elements actively engaged in a vis-a-vis posture. Kempler underlined the difficulty of the therapist's task when he asserted, "Persuading the patient to face himself or whoever he identifies as his oppressor. . .requires all the personal and professional skill the therapist can muster" (p.270).

The last two chapters have been concerned with the theory and methods of polarity integration in the Gestalt tradition.

In the next and concluding chapter the author will attempt to

complete the gestalt--to bring closure--by discussing some other dimensions of the integrating of polarities.

CHAPTER V

COMPLETING THE GESTALT: OTHER DIMENSIONS OF INTEGRATING POLARITIES

In this final chapter the author "completes the gestalt" by considering some other dimensions of the integrating of polarities. The following dimensions of integrating polarities will be discussed: (1) experimental studies, (2) the therapeutic value of integrating polarities, (3) limitations of integrating polarities, (4) counselling suggestions, and (5) areas worthy of further investigation in Gestalt therapy.

The chapter begins with a survey of current research on polarity work and on Gestalt therapy generally.

Experimental Studies

Is there research evidence for the effectiveness of Gestalt therapy, particularly regarding the effectiveness of the integrating of polarities? Is there experimental validation by which client and therapist reports could be checked? Are the reported breakthroughs in Gestalt workshops lasting? How do changes resulting from Gestalt therapeutic methods compare with changes resulting from other approaches? These and other questions direct the author as he considers available experimental and other evidence.

There is support for the general validity of the polarity perspective in the thinking of Jung, Kelly, and Bandler and Grinder.

Rigorous research on Gestalt therapy has not been conducted, possibly because of the experiential focus of the therapy. While

the literature contains numerous case reports, there are insufficient case histories. The theory, and the tapes and films of demonstrations, give "an impression of the validity in the theory and effectiveness of the method, at least for immediate results of awareness and insight" (Patterson, 1973, p.375).

Perls was interested more in explicating the theory and in developing the application than in undertaking rigorous research. To the request for proof he responded,

> We present nothing that you cannot verify for yourself in terms of your own behavior, but, if your psychological make-up is that of the experimentalist as we have portrayed him, this will not satisfy you and you will clamor for "objective evidence" of a verbal sort, prior to trying out a single non-verbal step of the procedure. (Perls, Hefferline & Goodman, 1951, p.7)

Clearly, personal encounter with Gestalt (an existential experiencing) is the best way to make an initial assessment of the therapy.

We go on to survey what Perls termed (above) "objective evidence." Are there studies on polarity integration? Greenberg and Higgins (1980) studied the effectiveness of the empty chair. Using 42 graduate students in counselling they examined the effects of the Gestalt two-chair method on conflict resolution, comparing it with a focussing technique followed by empathic reflection. Results showed a greater depth of experiencing was achieved in the two-chair technique than through the focussing technique. Both treatments produced significantly greater reported shifts in awareness and progress than did the no-treatment controls. Since the level of significance is not given, the results must be considered as only suggestive.

The author found just the one study on Gestalt polarity work. The literature reports, however, a number of studies on outcomes of Gestalt

work generally.

Foulds (1970) reported pre-testing and post-testing results on the Personality Orientation Inventory (a measure of self-actualization) between an experimental and a control group. Led by a facilitator with an experiential-Gestaltist orientation 20 undergrad students met weekly for nine weeks in a personal growth group. On the basis that eight out of twelve of the POI scales showed statistically significant ($p < .05$) positive change Foulds concluded that the personal growth group is an effective method for fostering increased self-actualization.

A study of 18 college students in a Gestalt marathon workshop (Foulds & Hannigan, 1976a) found significant changes ($p < .01$) using the Eysenck Personality Inventory in the direction of increased extraversion and decreased neuroticism.

Foulds and Hannigan (1976b) investigated the immediate and the long-term effects of a Gestalt marathon workshop. The experimental group met in a twenty-four hour continuous Gestalt workshop and completed the POI before the workshop, five days later, and six months later. Findings revealed significant positive pre-post changes ($p < .01$). A comparison of posttest and six-month follow-up scores disclosed that the achieved gains persisted over time and that additional positive change ($p < .05$) occurred.

The reports of several studies give no significance statistics. Without significance information these experimental studies must be regarded as primarily suggestive rather than as research yielding valid results. These studies will now be reported.

Foulds, Guinan, and Hannigan (1974) conducted a 24-hour marathon group with 18 undergraduates. Results on the California Psychological Inventory suggested that an experiential-Gestalt group enhances feelings of personal adequacy, fosters a sense of values and an acceptance of different values, and increases motivation in academic and social activities.

Adesso (1974) studied whether participation in a Gestalt growth would increase positive and decrease negative self-references. Eighteen college students participating in five two-hour sessions of a Gestalt group showed a significant increase in the number of positive self-references. Observers' reports showed no significant difference between the groups in regard to negative self-references.

A group of 60 high school students with negative school behaviors were randomly assigned to a Gestalt group, an alternative treatment group, and a control group (Gannon, 1972). The Gestalt-oriented group met in large and small groups for three-hour periods three times a week for a semester. FIRO-B (Fundamental Interpersonal Relations-Behavior) and SDAB (Harvey's Semantic Differential of Attitude Behaviors) test results showed that the experimental group demonstrated greater movement in the direction of improved openness and contact than did the other groups.

Connolly (1975) used the POI and FIRO-B and other criterion measures to study the effects of Gestalt techniques on 31 re-habilitation clients. The effects showed a significance level of $p < .25$.

Lightner (1976) was interested in demonstrating that Gestalt

therapy would decrease state anxiety, trait anxiety, future orientation, and past orientation. The results of his study demonstrated two conclusions: (1) Gestalt treatment significantly increased present orientation by decreasing past and future orientation, and (2) Gestalt therapy achieved nonsignificant trends in reduced trait and state anxiety.

The above studies investigated the effects of Gestalt methods on such outcomes as experiencing, self-actualization, extraversion and neuroticism, self-references, openness and contact, present orientation, and anxiety. The findings give overall support for the effectiveness of Gestalt methods.

What of research on Gestalt theory? Byrnes (1975) investigated Gestalt personality theory regarding psychological health and psychological disturbance. He noted that psychological health in the Gestalt approach is associated with good contact and that disturbance occurs when the natural contacting process is interrupted by confluence, projection, introjection, and retroflection. Byrnes used nominations, interviews, and a test made up of the Kleinmutz scale and the K scale of the MMPI to select fifteen healthy and fifteen disturbed students. An administration of the Q sort technique showed that the psychologically healthy were significantly ($p < .005$) more contactful while the psychologically disturbed subjects were significantly ($p < .005$) more interruptive of contact. Further analysis of the Q sorts elicited additional findings consistent with Gestalt personality theory.

From the research evidence reported one can rightly infer that the investigation of Gestalt therapy is at an initial stage. In

these studies the therapy consists of moderately intensive exercises, conducted over brief amounts of time, with populations of college undergrad and graduate students.

One must concur with James and MacKinnon (1979). After reviewing the current research literature, they concluded, "Gestalt has

> not. . . been rigorously compared to other methods. This indicates a need for research where changes which result from a Gestalt approach can be compared to changes resulting from other therapeutic approaches.
>
> As is the case for most of the humanistic therapeutic approaches, more evaluation of the method as an effective change procedure is required as well as substantial evaluation of the theory. (p.31)

The Therapeutic Value of Integrating Polarities

We can live our existence, metaphorically, in a basement room, as though that one room were all and there were no other rooms on other floors. The successful integrating of polarities opens up other "rooms" for living. The image of a house, in which only a part is inhabited, which comes to be lived in in all its corners, fully, freely, is a graphic way to catch the potential promise inherent in the integrating of polarities.

As a person meets and befriends the denied and distrusted parts of himself, he experiences increased expansion. When he is able to live from all of himself, he more fully exists. Energies previously required to keep a part of himself suppressed arenow available. Self-distrust, represented by the denied dark corners of himself, is increasingly replaced by the capacity to trust himself. His self-concept is stretched; the region of the acceptable is expanded.

As well as a sense of expansion, the integrating of polarities

is consistent with the ebb and flow of one's moment to moment experiencing. At times an individual is happy, at others sad, at times strong or weak. A narrow view of personality might tend to fix the personality at one or other of these points.

The integrating of polarities has much to do with the reconciliation of differences.[7] Differences are melted into a new unity, a zero centre. Dichotomies are transcended and a balance achieved.

An important aspect of resolving differences is work with projections. Through the acknowledging of projected material the person achieves an integration and the possibility of rewarding relationships.

With the owning of the denied pole, one is no longer forced to live according to a self-image: having to be "perfect." Integrating polarities brings a special freedom: the ability to be oneself.

Polarities integration rests on the proposition that one changes by becoming what one <u>is</u>, not by seeking to change to what one is not. The principle that we are to become what we are (already), and that the goal and the means to the goal are inextricably connected, is particularly hopeful and affirming. Change occurs when an individual fully experiences aspects of himself that have not been allowed into conciousness.

Gestalt polarity work (as with Gestalt work generally) is more practicable and accessible than such other methods as those of Freud and Jung and their disciples.

The theory of the integrating of polarities allows for a more profound view of man's nature than does the position that man is good,

self-actualizing, and able. Polarity theory opens the door to the recognition of a darker side of man. What theologians call sin (in the Pauline phrase, the good that we would we do not - Romans 7:19; man's demonic possibilities; Jung's shadow aspect of man) gains recognition as real, important, and valuable when viewed from a polar perspective. In the past, those who spoke of sin risked dismissal as pessimists. Yet an easy reliance on man's capacity for virtue (or, even, his perfectibility!) is at least as grave an error. The theological emphasis upon sin and man's need of salvation contains a more profound understanding of the human condition than does a humanistic utopianism. Gestalt therapy and other existential-humanistic emphases are means through which, in the words of theologian J.L. Walker (1971), "We are learning, in contemporary psychology and religion, to integrate the negative and positive perspectives into a more realistic view of man" (p.176).

As for the therapist himself, what does he gain through a polarity perspective? Not surprisingly, whatever value there is for the client is equally true for the therapist. Through the integrating of his own polarities he, too, experiences expansion of self, a firmer trust of self, a deepening of self-acceptance, and a new dimension of freedom.

What constitutes integration? The foregoing has noted aspects of integration from inner and theoretical perspectives. But, the reader may ask, What does integration look like? How is it manifested?

Before answering, I must check my terms. The word "integration" has the connotation of end point, arrival. That would be arrested development. Integration is more a process than a state of inertness:

a verb rather than a noun. In the words of Irma Lee Shepherd (1970),

> Full functioning, integration, and actualization, unless experienced in the moment rather than viewed as end states, can become as cruel an expectation and requirement as salvation. (p.238)

For these reasons, the word "integrating" more accurately conveys the desired meaning.

Integrating has to do with a process, an ongoing process, that is never achieved. It is a process rather than a set of categories (which might mistakingly convey norms of perfectibility). The same person is at times integrating and at others not. The integrating person is more often and more conciously participating in that process than is his nonintegrating counterpart.

Our question, What does the integrating person look like?, raises some difficulties. Cultural conditioning results in our favoring certain behaviors: for example, our culture favors smiling; in the Orient a serious manner may be preferred. Our culture's disvaluing of shyness, reservedness, and other characteristics of introversion may color the observer's judgment. A closely related factor to cultural bias is perceiver influence. The observer views subjectively (his perceiving influenced by his projections). Integrating, so observed, may reside primarily in the eye of the beholder.

How avoid the danger of "reading into" the observed behavior? The best safeguard is awareness: alertness to cultural and personal bias. Notwithstanding these hazards, an experienced obsérver must learn to trust his senses in sensing another.

In a five-minute contact with a stranger, what signs might suggest the presence or absence of integrating? If the subject's eyes are

steady, alive, and making contact, his facial expression and posture give an impression of ease and quietness, yet having ample energy and excitement, these would be indications of at least momentary integrating. If he speaks the language of responsibility (e.g. "I am angry," versus "You make me angry") and of the present, one senses integrating.

In contrast, if during brief contact one sees eyes that are dull, bored, and averted, and body stooped or jaw rigid, lacking energy and excitement or, perhaps, exhibiting an excessive enthusiasm, one is experiencing the absence of integrating.

Suppose the subject is viewed in the context of a life situation, for example, a funeral of a loved one. The nonintegrating person might seem caught up in appearances, having concerns about appropriateness of emotional expression, and generally unable to mourn. The integrating person will appear to be experiencing whatever he is feeling (without apology or fear) within himself and, if need be, with others.

The integrating person knows both health and unhealth, integration and nonintegration. It is not just that he lives more of his life toward the integrating dimension than does the nonintegrating person, but that he is aware of when he is integrating and when he is not. (Awareness is integral to the highest human evolvement; it is saints who experience the dark night of the soul.)

Both the integrating and nonintegrating person get out of balance. When the integrating person is depressed, lonely, or disheartened he "goes with" the moods, and appears to be propelled by them toward new levels of wholeness.

The nonintegrating person, in contrast, sees his imbalance as negative and seeks denial strategies or flees by turning the experience

into a headache. The nonintegrating person is at war with self. The integrating person explores self.

The integrating person has a wide range of behaviors. He is multidimensional, increasingly living his life intellectually, emotionally, physically, and spiritually.

He laughs, cries, and gets angry--spontaneously and appropriately. He suffers when suffering is real (Perls, undated (a), film). He is flexible in relation to himself and towards others.

His decisions appear to be his, arising from a sense of his own worth. There is an impression of integrity, of knowing who he is from moment to moment. His utterances express an orientation toward the present rather than indicating preoccupations with past and future.

Overall, there is an impression of growing, of learning from the past (reaping the fruits of the past and applying them to the present), of openness to present and future, in a zestful, healthy approach to his existence.

The nonintegrating person lives his life within a narrow range of behaviors. Censorious toward self, he is inclined to judgmental behavior toward others. He appears to be subject to both self-righteousness and self-humiliation. "Shoulds"appear frequently in his speech.

In place of a sense of self he looks to his environment for signals as to how he is to think and act.

He is inclined to dwell on the regrets of the past and on his hopes and anxieties for the future. He appears to be particularly susceptible to such human ills as depression and loneliness.

Overall, in the nonintegrating person, there is an impression of

not growing, of closedness toward present and future, in a colorless, less than healthy coping with his existence.

As the author concludes this discussion of integrating-non-integrating behavior a suggestion may be in order: where one reads "person" substitute "moment." Integrating is a way of being that a person (any person) may experience in a moment in time. The experience comes and goes; it cannot be possessed. These moments occur more frequently, more conciously--and, therefore, more profitably--in those persons we may call integrating. (Haymond (1976) calls the integrating person "the opening person.")

Limitations of Integrating Polarities

The strengths of the concept of polarities that move toward integration far outweigh any limitations. One needs to keep in mind, however, that a study of one aspect of a therapy, as this has been, is just that and behooves being cautious about extrapolating from but one perspective a total therapeutic system. If the integrating of polarities is made the pillar that supports and defines the procedures for facilitating personality change the concept will prove to be narrow and insufficient. Polarity is not the whole. Nevertheless, the integrating of polarities is a major focus in Gestalt work.

Polarizing is not always appropriate. A feeling of, say, grief may be deepened until intense loneliness emerges--without the emergence of a differing opposite feeling. Polarity theory acknowledges the validity of such experiencing, while, at the same time, urging therapeutic sensitivity to the possibility, however latent, of opposing feelings of, perhaps, relief.

The theory and process of polarity integration can be complicated. The appendices (appendix B) include a chart which was drafted with the aim of bringing some coherence to the research. The reader will note the complexity and the varied terms used to describe differentiation, identification, and assimilation. Perls, a non-intellectualizer by preference, managed to write a great deal of theory, some of it confusing. (He would defend the seeming lack of clarity on the grounds that the practitioner discovers and creates, through the grappling with the material, his own understanding.)

When one becomes lost in the complexity a pause may be in order. It may be that the problem lies primarily in an excessive dissecting, so that one is missing the whole, the gestalt. From the beginning, molecular (versus molar) psychological study was antithetical for Perls.

The most serious limitation in Gestalt polarity work is the danger of becoming a tactician. The approach is vulnerable to the adept who, with little knowledge, rush in, and achieve little result or do damage. The powerful techniques of the therapy can be merely gimmickry. There is no substitute for training, training that is experiential and that is grounded on sound theory.

The disciples of Perls are tempted to the sterility of blind imitation, rather than the vitality of finding their own style to suit the uniqueness of the situation. A prime motivation for embarking on this study was the author's desire to buttress with sound theory his acquaintance with Gestalt methods. But learning alone is insufficient. One must go beyond what Kempler (1973) terms "trying to become a

disciple of a method" to "using the principles of the method to better represent oneself" (p.254). Each individual who uses this approach must choose and develop a style that best fits him and expresses who he is and who he is becoming. One is impressed with the quiet voice of a Naranjo (audiotape), the articulate and authoritative approach of Jim Simkin (audiotape), and the gentle caring of Bill Porter, an Alberta practitioner. The author affirms the uniqueness of these men, and respects their success in assimilating their learning from Perls and others without getting caught in blind introjections. Good therapists are uniquely themselves.

Perls worked with individuals; his workshops were one-to-one interactions in a group context. There is little of marriage and family therapy in his writings. Systems theory has drawn attention to the interpersonal milieu in which individuals function as they work out their individuality. Perls seems to have given little attention to interpersonal systems, though such principles as unfinished gestalt and homeostasis are consistent with intrapersonal systems theory.

To speak of the danger of becoming technicians as a limitation is somewhat akin to evaluating mathematics by examining the mathematical competence of beginning students. Gestalt polarity theory has a great deal to contribute to the therapeutic enterprise.

In the next pages some counselling suggestions are made regarding when to consider a polarity intervention and possible dangers to be aware of in integrating polarities.

Counselling Suggestions

When to Use the Integrating of Polarities

Gestalt techniques can be powerful tools for effecting the integration of polarities. They can also be ineffectual. Ineffectiveness may be the result of imitating another therapist, falling back on an intervention that worked well in the past, or virtually any response that does not emerge out of the unique needs of the moment. Laura Perls identified the sine qua non for effectiveness when she said, "Magic in therapy is a question of timing" (in Latner, 1973, p.204).

One considers doing polarity work when conflict is present. The person feels himself pulled in opposing ways. In some instances one of the opposites is not evident. At such times the therapist works to make explicit the implicit.

Closely related to the phenomenon of conflict is indecision. Polarity work can be useful in clarifying alternatives and in achieving resolution.

States of confusion and undifferentiated feeling are signals to consider "staying with" the confusion until some feeling or feelings begin to emerge (i.e. differentiate out). Such feelings will often show themselves as opposites. For example, confusion might differentiate into fear and wish, weakness and strength.

Integrating polarities is particularly appropriate when the client presents an excessive one-sidedness. When a person is too good, very weak, very strong, very virtuous, or presents other postures of imbalance, the therapist will be alert to the latent presence of an

opposing side.

When there is blaming and criticalness one is probably dealing with projection. Working with polarities will assist the client to identify and assimilate his projections. When a group member indicates dislike for another, the therapist will have to decide whether to deal with the situation as a relationship matter or to deal with it as a projection by the attacker.

The technique chosen must be selected to fit the person and the circumstances. Looking for polarities will be effective only insofar as the endeavour arises in response to what is present in the client.

Dangers in Integrating Polarities

Are there dangers in working with polarities? In their excellent work, Gestalt Therapy Integrated, the Polsters warn that the restoring of contact with a suppressed part of the self can re-mobilize long suppressed excitement resulting in the individual's experiencing over-stimulation and "a fear of literally bursting or exploding" (p.68).[6] How does one know the individual's limits? The basic safeguard is to have "A basic respect for the self-regulation of the individual--not forcing or seducing him into behaviors which he himself has not largely set up" (Polster & Polster, p.68). Self-regulation is another way of saying that the individual is responsible for himself. He is responsible for his own safety and does not do what he feels incapable of doing.

Perls and Goodman concluded an early article (1950), "The Theory of 'The Removal of Inner Conflict,'" urging that the danger of emotional damage be met boldly:

> The danger in an emotional conflict is that its raging may destroy the patient, tear him in pieces. This is a true danger. But it must be met not by weakening the conflict but by strengthening the self and the self-awareness, so that as the conflict emerges and is attended to and sharpens, the self may sooner reach an attitude of creative indifference and identify with the coming solution. (In 1975, p.43)

Dangers of another kind have concerned Kovel (1976). Through its emphasis upon emotional rather than on intellectual experience Gestalt procedures can induce a state of near hysteria. In the midst of emotional vulnerability an unscrupulous therapist can exploit infantile attitudes of the transference and set himself up as a seer or guru (p.125). Reinhold Niebuhr warned of the temptation to "illusions of grandeur." Pretensions of grandeur in a therapist violate the client's capacity for autonomy.

Because growth involves risking, in any psychotherapeutic approach the possibility for a destructive outcome exists. Sensitivity toward the self-regulation of the client is the best prevention against the occurrence of negative results.

Areas Worthy of Further Investigation in Gestalt Therapy

It may be useful in this final section to broaden the focus from the topic of the integrating of polarities to the subject of Gestalt therapy generally. The author begins by essaying some general reactions to Gestalt. This is followed by a noting of areas or concerns in Gestalt therapy that may deserve further investigation.

Perls sought to help persons discover aliveness, spontaneity, creativity, and authenticity. That he had considerable success in his aims is attested to by the witness of his followers, the wide acceptance of his writings, and the existence of workshops at Esalen

and at growth centres scattered across the continent.

Gestalt's impressive success in freeing persons to be themselves grew out of the timely conjunction of Gestalt therapy with the human potential movement. That movement rescued Perls' approach from the relatively obscure destiny that could be expected for another variant of psychoanalysis.

Perls brought his therapy to a society that was inhibited, verbal, educated, comfortable, bored, and out of touch with feelings. An education in feeling, Gestalt therapy has been an attempt to restore feelings to many members of North American culture.

To reintroduce feelings to a society living a death-in-life existence is not, strictly speaking, a therapy. Gestalt is not so much a therapy as a life style, a philosophy, a personal guidance system, and a means for increasing one's potential and maximizing one's growth. It is a way of living in a simple, direct manner.

Following these general reactions to Gestalt therapy, the author will now suggest some concerns worthy of further study.

An investigation of a topic is likely to stir up further questions, issues, and concerns. The author's study of polarity integration has picked up along the way some key issues in Gestalt therapy, issues that may deserve further reflection and investigation. The last few pages of the chapter are devoted to areas in Gestalt therapy deserving further investigation.

Perls' view of the mature man as having autonomy and self-responsibility is a welcome emphasis after the neglect of self that traditionally has been seen as virtuous. But the rigorous autonomy of

the Gestalt Prayer ("I do my thing and you do your thing") risks cutting the nerve of social conscience and dulls the sensitivity and motivation that are necessary for persons to live together in community. He who fully lives the gestalt prayer and is radically self-supporting may achieve ultimate loneliness: having no need for the help that comes through interdependence, he may have little opportunity for contact with others. Is Perls' insistence on authentic self-support valid, or is it an overreaction to dependent behavior?

Unbridled individualism contains the seed for a new tyranny, the life centered on itself. In the words of Paul Tournier (1968), "The true meaning of life cannot be found in egotistical self-fulfillment" (p.221). The lives of the saints, and of Christ, demonstrate that magnificent living has to do with living for others. Christ's life shows the necessity of love of neighbor and love of self, two poles in balance, one flowing from the other. Can Gestalt therapy affirm love to neighbor within its imperative for self-fulfillment?

Gestalt calls for a dropping of the good-bad, right-wrong split. Such dichotomies are seen as errors of perception, derived from parental injunctions and maintained in the individual as introjections. The giving of choice to the individual (calling nothing right or wrong without the individual's consent) can only be welcomed. The outcome, however, may be to jettison all ethics. Ethical sensibilities can be inhibiting and life denying. They can also be ennobling--witness Martin Luther King. A sense of oughtness, a vision of a larger scheme of things that calls forth our commitment, is one of

the dimensions separating human beings from other species.

The anti-intellectualist bent of Gestaltists (e.g. "Lose your mind and come to your senses ") plays a sizeable role in a reluctance to engage in self-criticism of their own position. Questions about theory and principles are dismissed as "head stuff." While it is true that intellectual activity can distort awareness, there is a creative use of the intellect that can be distinguished from intellectualization, a defense mechanism. Reasoning and reflection must not be sidelined if an approach is to remain valid. Reflection on values and goals is a neglected activity for most psychologists, perhaps especially those who are therapists of whatever stripe.

In Perls' published material there is little indication of interest in the spiritual and the transcendent. John Lilly (1972), speaking appreciatively of his work at Esalen with Perls and others, reflected that he had "found new spaces having to do with the planetside trip" (p.107). The mystical part (his mystical side) was beyond the limits that the Esalen group put on their own experiences. To be whole includes experiencing one's spirituality.

If we agree with Kempler (1973) that the evolving personality has three phases, social, psychophysical, and spiritual, then Gestalt, to date, clearly belongs to the first two. The psychology of tomorrow is likely to go beyond mental illness and mental health, sickness and well-being, toward a last gestalt. Allowing for a spiritual dimension, Latner (1974) foretells: "The momentum of our development is toward wholes that encompass more and more of the potential of the organism/environment field" (p.226).

Gestalt therapy can play an important role in leading a person along the journey toward personhood. It is not capable of taking him all the way; other lights will be necessary. At Esalen Gestalt is combined with bioenergetics, encounter, and other approaches and, therefore, loses its clear identity without losing its importance. It may be that this is a sign that Gestalt will not be identifiable over a long period of time as psychoanalysis has been; for, it is not sufficiently complete to be <u>the</u> therapy for our time.

PERSONAL COMMENTS

I began this thesis with a desire to understand: to understand the integrating of polarities so that I might better comprehend client behavior and respond appropriately and effectively. I am pleased to be able to say that the goal of understanding has been largely achieved.

I have valued the opportunity to read the literature, perhaps especially the becoming acquainted with the historical roots of Perls' thought.

I like the several-sidedness of the research: history, other theorists, theory, practice, and assessment. I feel that the thesis has balance. I am gratified that each of the areas of investigation was personally interesting: I was meeting my own needs, not just satisfying thesis requirements. I have appreciated the fact that the structure (my committee and the rules of the department of grad studies) has allowed me the freedom to do my thing.

I feel that the thesis is representative of me. I'm pleased that I resisted alternative topics and research designs that were suggested by myself or others, directions that would have been less me.

Polarity has received insufficient attention. The topic was worthy of treatment. Moreover, it provided boundaries. The polarities focus avoided the dangers inherent in what might otherwise have been an unfocussed attempt to comprehend the entire world of Gestalt.

As I struggled with the concepts I found myself using them in my counselling (at Grant MacEwan Community College), perhaps particularly with a person working through grief. Watching the "Gloria" film, a

film I had seen several times before, I caught polarity references that I had completely missed previously.

While I have been glad of the chance to read the Gestalt literature--and am critical of Gestaltists who are not well acquainted with the literature--I am convinced that Gestalt cannot be understood apart from participation. My participation in two two-day Gestalt workshops during the thesis project was very useful.

I've become appreciative of Perls' genius and of him himself: his courage, his honesty, his limitations. His work is a remarkable achievement.

I have been grateful for the help of my committee. This committee has had much more active involvement than those who were associated with my previous theses. The final product is better in clarity, in organization, and in content for their involvement. The combination of encouragement and challenge has been beneficial.

Has the experience of this project made me a more integrating person? Yes, somewhat. The workshops were helpful, and understanding has assisted my self-understanding. But awareness (the means to integration) is not a cognitive thing.

I've worked hard. After four months of brainstorming to find a topic, there was a year and a half of research and writing.

I have a sense of accomplishment. I feel that the thesis is a worthy piece of work. I would like to think that it may be useful to others.

CONCLUSION

This study began with a desire to understand the dynamics of polarity integrating, a desire that had risen out of a dramatic counselling session, coupled with an encountering of Jung's shadow in a reading of the novel Fifth Business by Robertson Davies. Essentially a search for understanding the integrating of polarities, the study led to the investigation of several aspects of the topic.

In discovering the background of Gestalt therapy, it was learned that the approach has roots in psychoanalysis, Reichian character analysis, existentialism and Friedlander, gestalt psychology, and Eastern religion.

The historical basis of Gestalt therapy was followed by a survey of polarity ideas in other selected theorists: Heraclitus, Jung, Kelly, and Bandler and Grinder.

A theoretical exploration clarified that the integrating of polarities in Gestalt therapy involves three phases: differentiation, identification, and assimilation.

Theory was succeeded by an examination of the basic modes and techniques that Gestaltists employ in effecting polarity integration.

The concluding chapter assessed the therapeutic value of integrating polarities, made counselling suggestions, and suggested areas deserving further investigation.

The author's personal comments indicated that his desire to understand--what must be regarded as a fundamental dimension of Gestalt therapy--the integrating of polarities, had been essentially achieved.

The author--and hopefully the reader also--returns to his counselling (and to his personal life) ready to demonstrate the validity of the thesis: Gestalt therapy's theory and practice of integrating polarities in the individual personality is of high value in the therapeutic task.

FOOTNOTES

[1]There has been not only but limited interest in the sources from which Gestalt therapy emerged, but it may be that the theory itself has not received adequate attention. Kogan's (1973) dissertation, reporting interviews and other contacts with gestaltists in the San Francisco area, says that even practicing Gestalt therapists have read only portions of Perls' writings (pp.37-42). This state of affairs my be explained in part by the difficulty of the early works, especially Ego, Hunger, and Aggression, Perls' first book. It may reflect also the split in Perls' attitude to the intellectual process, in which he tended to put down intellectual pursuits: he once called intellect "The whore of intelligence" (Shepard, 1975, p.161). It appears that Perls' followers may lack adequate awareness of the philosophical underpinnings of the therapeutic activities in which they are engaged.

[2]In a fascinating discussion, Van Dusen (1975) talks of the importance of exploring the empty spaces. For example, the person who fears going down into depression is encouraged to do so and discovers that "The feared empty space is a fertile void. Exploring it is a turning point towards therapeutic change" (p.90). Later he relates that in Wu Wei "the blankness, the state is characterized by total uncertainty. . . .It is a void, no-mind, but it is certainly not empty. It is chaotic with possibilities. One feels helpless and waits. It is central that one's own will can no longer find the way out" (p.93).

[3]Perls took his eating most seriously. While the guest of Van Dusen, a psychologist in California, Perls' eating ritual irritated Mrs. Van Dusen. His table habits and his care of his bedroom were sloppy, devoid of the least adherence to social graces, observances Perls considered phony. Of his meal-time ritual Van Dusen observed:

> We had to learn that his eating style was somewhat unusual. Eating was a very sacred ritual for him, and we didn't bother him with any chit-chat or anything else. He was going to chew away. He could be quite cruel at the table until he finally conditioned you to behave the way he expected you to behave. And that was that you don't bother him with anything, for he was engaged in a very gustatory, concentrated thing. (in Shepard, 1975, p.100)

[4]Eight years ago the author had four counselling sessions with a woman in her forties. She was experiencing loneliness and especially guilt over the suicide three months earlier of her elderly mother whose death followed that of her husband a few months earlier. During one session, role playing herself and her mother, she had a dialogue between her guilty side and her forgiving, affirming side (mother), and was able to forgive herself and stop judging herself (assimilation). I was impressed with the economy of time the use of the empty chair

achieved.

[5]On the way to conduct worship in a rural Ontario church one Sunday, the author was feeling dispirited. I pulled my car over to the side of the road and allowed myself to enter into the fantasy of an inner room. Presently, in imagination I experienced myself as a bedroom that looked similar to a room in the house we lived in when I was a child. In my fantasy, the room was impoverished, drab (a work that described exactly the feeling I was experiencing).

I then noticed that there were curtains and that they were gently moving with the air from the slightly open windows--a fact that surprised me in the midst of the drabness and that I had not noticed earlier. I emerged from the fantasy now feeling a pleasant aliveness (full awareness of the drab side had allowed the emergence of an alive side) and went on to have a satisfying morning.

[6]During a Gestalt group the author half-heartedly expressed some anger. In order to get me more in touch with my anger an experiment was tried. I lay prone on my stomach. The group members held me down as I, vigorously, and with some feeling of satisfaction, pushed against the floor and sought to rise. Comments were made expressing regard for my strength. The pushing against was done two or three times, interspersed with brief rests. Suddenly my feelings of anger and strength changed to fear. I felt myself drowning in the middle of a lake or ocean, able to thrash around, but unable to save myself! I was absolutely terrified.

At that moment I was utterly vulnerable. It is a credit to the therapist that he did not permit the action to continue. By his respecting my limits (what he later explained as the organism's putting the brakes on), I emerged undamaged and open to the possibility of one day exploring my terror further.

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Since writing the above paragraphs I have attended a Gestalt workshop and again found myself experiencing the catastrophic terrors of my impasse. I requested that the process go no further, on the grounds that I did not trust the group to be sufficiently sensitive to my fragility. The leader responded that the truth was that I did not trust myself.

> [7]It seems to me that the sine qua non of man's knowledge, happiness, and existence is to be found in the idea of the reconciliation of differences. It matters little whether we talk about mental health and personality structure or whether we talk in the context of society. It matters little what the size of the society is. It makes little difference whether the society is a marriage, a small group, a large industrial organization, a community, a nation, or many nations; the basic issue is that of the reconciliation of the individual with the group, the organization, the integration of parts into a unified whole.

These issues are all matters of totality, wholeness, completeness, unity, order, structure. (Ronald C. Jones, in Zinker, 1977, p.195).

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APPENDIX A: HEALTH AND UNHEALTH IN GESTALT THERAPY

UNHEALTH	INTEGRATING OF POLARITIES	HEALTH
Personality split, in conflict		Personality centered, unified
Parts disowned, suppressed		Parts owned
Alienation, one part victim of the other		Identification, cooperation
Contradiction, incompatibility (no contact)		Homeostasis
Imbalance, one-sidedness		Balance, many-sidedness
Fixed self-image		Organismic self-regulation
Rigidity		Spontaneity
Either/or belief		Both/and belief
Incomplete awareness		Full awareness
Manipulation (environmental support)		Expression (self support)
Unfinished situations		Closure
Low energy		Aliveness
Defensiveness - Projection - Retroflection - Introjection - Confluence		Contact

APPENDIX B: THE THREE PHASES OF THE INTEGRATING OF POLARITIES

(CENTERING)

. . . . . .AWARENESS . . . . . .

. . . . . .INVOLVEMENT/FULL EXPERIENCING/IMMEDIACY . . . . . .

Differential Thinking
(Thinking in opposites)

Undifferentiated Feelings
Fertile Void
Zero-point/centre
Predifference
Wu Chi

Creative Indifference
Interested in zero-point
Interested in dichotomy
Detachment to either pole

DIFFERENTIATION
Separating out
Into fighting opposites
Into differentiated feelings
Tai Chi and Yin Yang
Split
Clarification

IDENTIFICATION
Re-owning of not-self
Likeness of the not alike
"I" vs alienation

Enactment
Contact/Hearing
Make conflict open
Heighten the difference

ASSIMILATION
Reconciliation
Enemy become friend
Inclusion
Both/and
Coming together
Fight for control given up
Closure
(Surprise)

Appendices C and D are transcriptions of films by Fritz Perls. Bracketed material consists of the author's comments relating to (1) differentiation into polarities, (2) identification (re-owning) of polarities, and (3) assimilation and integration of polarities. In addition to these theoretical concerns there are some general observations on the conduct of the therapy.

APPENDIX C: FREDERICK S. PERLS - MADELINE'S DREAM (FILM)

(The dialogue is from Perls, Eyewitness to Therapy, pages 190-194.)

Perls: Now I would like to integrate more the idea of dream work and total identification work. So, who wants to work on a dream? (Madeline comes forward--a pretty dark-haired French girl.) This time, as much as possible, I want you to always return to your experience. [Awareness of one's experiencing is essential at each step of the integrating of polarities.] Right now--what do you feel right now?

Madeline: Um...

P: You feel 'um.' Keep your eyes and ears open. Every clue is to be accepted.

M: I feel like taking my shoes off. (Laughs) I feel the need to be clear when I tell my dream. [Perls had lit a cigarette. He's listening; appears to be leaving full responsibility to her. A long pause...]

P: Okay.

M: Uh, the dream I have, I experienced when I was very young, maybe about eight years old, and I've experienced it even lately. I'm standing on the shore. The shore is sort of sandy and soft and there's wood around me. In front, there's a lake that is very round. I don't see the other end of the lake where I'm standing right now, but the lake, I know, is very round, very circular, and not edgy shore. It's a very soft lake and the light is very beautiful. There is not sun, but it is very bright in the sky.

P: Ya. Let me work on the dream a bit. Be the lake. And Lake, tell me your story. [Why did he choose the lake and not

the shore, or the person standing, or the sky? "Lake tell me your story" - Perls already deals with her as the person identified with the lake. This helps her toward immediate involvement, toward identification of polarities.]

M: Um, lake, uh, you want to tell me your story?

P: Be a lake and tell me your story.

M: Uh, I'm a round, round lake. I feel, I sort of feel perfect, perfect lake. I, my water is very good and soft to the touch.

P: To whom are you talking?

M: To myself.

P: Now you know the third law in Gestalt therapy. Do unto others what you do unto yourself. Talk to us.
[This command helps bring her into the here and now identification.]

M: Um...

P: You're the lake.

M: I'm the lake. You would like to come in me, in my lake, in this lake, because it's very beautiful, and the water feels very... [Sexual connotations. Perls seems to have missed the obvious here.]

P: The second law in Gestalt therapy--don't say it; say I or you. [Use of the first person "I" promotes identification.]

M: Um...(moves a little)

P: You notice I'm beginning to become very officious.

M: You would like to come into me. [Sexual] You can swim into me very easily and there's nothing mucky in my bottom. My bottom is of pure sand. And when you come into the middle of my lake, there's a surprise. There's something that you don't know. And it might frighten you or you might like it very much, but there's something right in the middle of me, in the lake, that is very strange, and you have to swim or row to get to it. You don't see if it from the shore, so it's really worth swimming to go and see it. (Laughs)

P: See 'it'?

M: See me. (Laughs) [Identification]

P: Say this again to the group.

M: It's worth swimming in me or taking a boat, not a power boat.

P: Who is 'it'? 'It's' worth.

M: Uh, it's worth to you?

P: Who is 'it,' 'it' is worth?

M: The...it is worth...

P: Don't say 'it.' Try 'I'. 'I' am worth.

M: I am. I am worth--you swimming or taking a boat and coming to see what's in the middle of the lake, because it's a surprise.

P: 'It' is a surprise?

M: Uh, I am a surprise.
[Client takes responsibility for herself, instead of the avoiding 'It': identification.]
You might not solve the surprise, though. It's a, I have in... the middle of my lake, I have a statue. It's a little boy, and he's pouring water...but many people...when I go in that lake and I come to drink the water, I wake up, so maybe...

P: Wait, stop here. Close your eyes. Go on dreaming. Now the waking up is a beautiful gimmick to interrupt the solution to the dream.
[Perls does interpret somewhat when he says the waking up interrupts the solution. However, he does not interpret the meaning.]

M: The...
[Long pause. Eyes closed.]

P: You came back to us. Did you go on dreaming?

M: The same dream? It took a long time before I came to the dream. I saw the lights in my eyes and feeling of, of very busy.

P: Gesticulate this. Go on. [Enactment to promote identification.]

M: Very busy. (Moves arms about and laughs)

P: Dance it. (She does a dance mostly with arm movements.)
[Her legs and feet don't move at all. Perls could have dealt with this, but didn't. He went on to the statue. She sat and looked at him, perhaps for direction. She seemed less involved right now. Perhaps that's why he returned to the statue.]
All right. Now let's have the story of the figure of the statue. You're now the statue.

M: I'm a statue in the middle of the lake. [Enactment or becoming the part in order to facilitate identification of the polarity.]

P: To whom are you talking?

M: I was trying to talk to Helen. (Laughs) I'm grey and sort of, uh, I'm pretty classical looking. I'm looking like most little statues of little boys you would see. And I hold a vessel. It is a vase that has a small neck and big in the bottom. And I hold it, and though I'm in the water, I pour it--I pour this water in the lake. I don't know where it comes from, but this water is extremely pure, and you would really benefit from drinking this water. You would feel all good all over because you had water on the outside of your body from the lake I am sitting in the middle of. And the water is really good outside of your body. But then, I really want you to drink the water I'm giving from my vessel because it will really make you feel good inside, also. I don't know why, but sometimes, you cannot drink it, you just come to drink it--you're all happy and then you're swimming and you want to drink it and then you can't drink it. I cannot bend to you. I can just keep on pouring my water and then hoping you can come and drink it.

P: Say that last sentence again to us.

M: I cannot come down and give the water to you. I just can keep on pouring it and hoping that you will come and drink it. I just can keep on pouring it.

P: Okay. Now, play the water. Tell us. You're now the water. [Is this an emerging polarity? Or, just another part the significance of which is not yet clear?]

M: In the vessel?

P: Yes, the water in the vessel. What's your script, What's your story, Water?

M: (Pause) I don't know much about myself.

P: And again.
[Repetition to heighten awareness: identification.]

M: I don't know much about myself. (Pause, begins to cry) I come. I don't know how I come but I know I'm good, that's all I know. I would like you to drink me because I know I'm good. I don't know where I come from...I'm in that big vase. It's a black vase.

P: Now, get up. Say this to each one of us. Stand up. Go

to each one of us and tell us this. You're the water. [Enactment and making the rounds to deepen identification. She's standing while the others sit. No weakening of her awareness through premature embracing.]

M: (Crying and sniffing) I'm water in a vase and I don't know where I come from. But I know I'm good to drink. I'm water in a vase.
[Standing. Agitated. Tears.]

P: Use your own words now.

M: I look like water and they call me water and I'm just there in the vase. And there's no hole in the vase. I don't know where, nobody, I'm just there all the time, I'm just pouring out, and I'd like you to drink me.

P: Go on to the next.

M: I'm there and I'm white and pure, and if you ask me where I come from I can't tell you. But it's a miracle, I always come out, just for you to drink me. You have to get out of the other water and come. (Goes to the next person, crying) I'm in a vase, and I don't know where I come from but I'm coming out all the time, and you have to drink me, every little bit of it.

P: Now what are you doing with yourself? [She is holding herself with her arms.]

M: I'm holding myself.

P: Do this to me. (Goes over to him and rubs his arms)
[After holding herself, she holds him: bipolar actions.]
Okay, sit down. So what do you experience now.

M: I feel I've discovered something. [Beginning of an assimilation.]

P: Yeah? What?

M: I used to think, I thought of the dreams, I used to think the water in the vase was spirituality.

P: Mmhhmm.

M: Beauty of, of birth and ...it's such a mystery for me, the beauty of life, and I thought that the vase was a secret, and I wasn't high enough to drink the water. That's why I woke up. When I was very small, it didn't

bother me--I was just happy of swimming. I didn't care not drinking the water, waking up. But as I grew older I got more and more resentful not to be able to drink the water...

P: All right. This is as far as I want to go. [Termination here seems abrupt. Her identification with her spirituality has just started. Assimilation is not yet complete.] Again, you see the same thing that we did before with dreams. No interpretation. You know everything; you know much more than I do and all my interpretations would only mislead you. It's again, simply the question of learning, of uncovering your true self. [A good definition of the goal of therapy and the goal for one's life.]

APPENDIX D: FREDERICK PERLS AND GESTALT THERAPY (FILM)

(The dialogue in this excerpt was transcribed by the author while viewing the film.)

Perls is conducting a group of six persons. Jane, a woman in her thirties, is relating a dream.

Perls: Tell your dream in the present tense.

Jane: Karen (daughter) and I are driving on the freeway. . . accident. . .she can't stop. We crash. I'm dead and Karen is...

P: What is she doing? [increases vividness and involvement]

J: She's trying to...She's shaking (Jane is shaking her arms, seemingly both imitating Karen's shaking and expressing her own difficulty in expressing the scene).
Mom! Mom! (tears). Oh, my God. What am I going to do?
Mom! (crying desperately, wringing her hands).
What have I done? Mom, talk to me, Mom.

I can't, because I'm dead.

I can't say anything to her, because I'm dead.

P: Have you seen the film, Rashomon?
(She nods affirmatively)
There the dead can speak. How would you answer?
[Be the parts of the dream, starting with self.
Differentiation through enactment.]

J: You couldn't help it. You couldn't stop. Don't torture yourself. You tried. You didn't have time.

P: And let her talk back. Create a dialogue. [Dialogue to increase differentiation]

J(K): If I weren't daydreaming, I could have stopped.

J: You couldn't. Even if I was driving I couldn't stop.

P: But she doesn't listen to you.

J: She's blaming herself. She's feeling guilty. [Critical topdog and guilty underdog]

P: Say this to her. Make her listen. [Talking <u>about</u>, i.e. third person, changed to second person, You, in

order to promote contact between the two parts; getting the two parts to listen to each other: identification of polarities.]

J: Don't feel guilty. Don't torture yourself.

P: Let her talk back.

J(K): I know I could have stopped. [Opposites still warring, more intensely now than at the beginning]

J: Please listen.

P: Say it again. [Repetition used to reinforce a key sentence and, therebye, to heighten awareness: identification.]

J: Please listen.

P: Again.

J: Please listen.

P: Now be Karen listening to you and accepting the blame.

J(K): I don't want to think of you gone. I couldn't help it. I don't want to go through life thinking I killed you.

J: It was unintentional.

P: Now, let's play the car. [Perls stays with the scene until there appears to be no further figure emerging, and then changes the scene]

J(Car): This teenager behind the wheel is not a bad driver. But she can't control it.

P: Does she listen?

(Pause)

J: The car didn't even have a chance to...

P: What do you experience now?

J: The inevitable can't be avoided. [Speaking without blame or guilt. An assimilation is emerging.]

P: Yes, perhaps.

J: After I said that the inevitable can't be avoided, a new vision opened.

P: So you got something out of the dream. Implode instead of explode.

J: I would like to explode but can't quite make it.

P: Can you talk to Jane? Can you say, Jane, how are you holding yourself back? [Confronting the avoidance. Re-owning the avoidance: identification.]

J: The teenager in me is fighting back. The mother says, "Act more like a lady." [Mother is topdog]

P: Now say this to your daughter. [Perls has the option of a dialogue between mother and unladylike daughter, but chooses to return to Jane-Karen interaction]

J: I can't. [Resistance against owning the critical part of herself.]

P: How come?

J: I more thought of saying, "You're frivolous," to her.

P: Is she too frivolous?

J: No.

P: So it doesn't apply to the real daughter?

J: I can't imagine saying that to Karen. Isn't that strange? [She seems to acknowledge that there is an issue]

P: I'm a bit lost right now. [Pretending or real? Simply being open?]

J: I'm confused myself. [His openness helped her identify her own feelings]

P: OK, close your eyes and enter your confusion. See how you experience confusion. [Confusion is the signal of an impasse: two polarities pulling in opposite directions. Therapeutic response: "Be confused:" encourages differentiation.]

(Pause)

P: I see you sitting rigidly, frowning, computing. Not willing to experience confusion. You want to sort it out. [No interpretation. Just reporting what he sees]

J: I want to be too logical.

P: Yes, so try once more. See how you can experience confusion... Where are you now? Back to your computer? ["Staying with" the confusion: differentiation.]

P: Aha (=Yes). So talk to your computer. Put your computer. in that chair (He points to a chair in the middle). [Dialogue with the avoidance to achieve identification.]

J: My computer won't stop.

P: Aha (=Yes). So talk to your computer. Put your computer in that chair (He points to a chair in the middle). [Dialogue with the avoidance to achieve identification.]

J: I wish you'd turn yourself off. Leave me alone. You erase everything. You tighten up now. OK. OK that's enough.

P: Did you see, you lost your rigidity? You became alive [Assimilation.] Go back, be the computer. Sit on this chair (points to the chair in the center) and talk back to Jane.

J(computer): Well, Jane, if I'm not there to tell you (what to do), you can't live without me.

P: Change seats.

J: You sure do. But I don't like it. [Avoidance of full experiencing.]

P: Who's it?

J: I don't like you.

P: Again. (Asks her three time to repeat). [Repetition emphasizes the split of the polarities.]

J: I hate you.

P: Change seats.

J(computer): You think you're smart. You'd better listen.

P: Again.

J(computer): Listen.

P: Change seats.

J: I heard you, loud, and clear. I still don't like it. Help me, but don't run me. [Possibility of an integration beginning to emerge]

P: Again.

J: I need your help, but I don't need you to run me. Only to guide me, help me. Please don't try to run me.

P: Change seats again. [Reinforcing the synthesis]

J(computer): I guess you can. OK. Why don't you try it? I'll give you a chance. I'll help you.

P: OK.
You didn't come to a complete integration but at least you're willing to take a risk now. So, come back to us. How do you feel about us? (Jane looks around. Her look is one of quietness; togetherness. She looks appreciatively at the others).

P: Any mini-satori...? A small waking up? Are you a little more in touch? OK. That's as far as I want to go. (He notices something in her expression).

J: Warmer.

P: Yah. The cold computer is getting a bit warmer. One day you will be able to think and. . .write poetry. You will have brought it together.

J: What was that again? [Asks for an explanation. Perls responds by handing responsibility back to her.]

P: Could you, right now, make a poem out of your experience. [To deepen the integration.] (Her mouth looks relaxed; her eyelids are blinking)

P: Don't think, just...

J: It's lovely (eyes closed).
It's warm
It's beautiful.
It's a <u>beautiful</u> feeling! (Looks at Perls with a beautiful smile).

Thank you (takes his hand). [She has found her zero-centre. She experiences feelings of beauty and wholeness. A moment of integration.]

P: You are beautiful.

P: (To the group) You see what happens in all these cases. The fighting, clarification, beginning to listen, in the best cases, like with Jane, a coming together. When we get this fragmentation we try to find out what are the

fighting polarities?. . . .That way we integrate more and more, taking more and more back what we have alienated from our personality and become more and more capable of coping with life. And then, instead of blaming this part and fighting and trying to be perfect and all that crap, we begin to be, to breathe, to enjoy ourselves, and to suffer when suffering is real. What more can you want from therapy? What more can you want from life? Thank you.